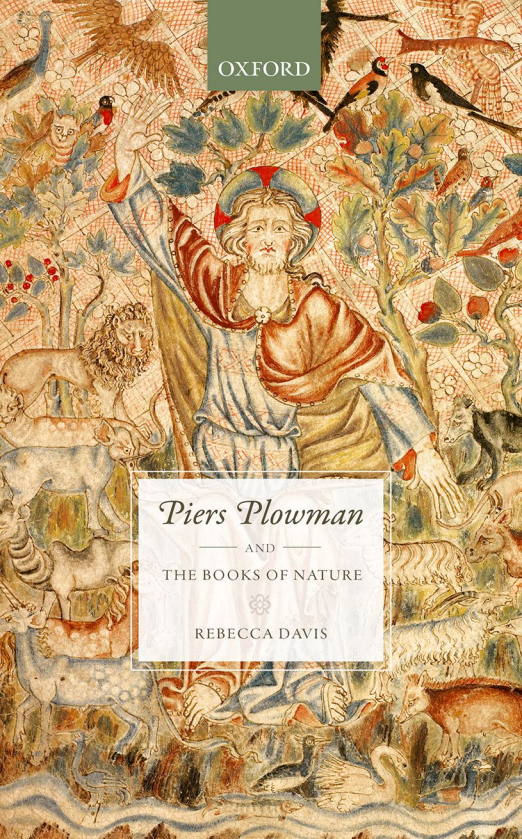




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Piers Plowman

— AND —

THE BOOKS OF NATURE



REBECCA DAVIS

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PIERS PLOWMAN AND THE
BOOKS OF NATURE

Piers Plowman and the Books of Nature

REBECCA DAVIS

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For Jeremy

Preface

Before the advent of modern science, medieval poets and philosophers used the trope of the *liber naturae*, or book of nature, as a means to establish nature's value for human life. This Neoplatonic metaphor construes the world as a legible text: properly studied or "read," nature reveals knowledge about its divine author and guidelines for moral and ethical living. Indeed, the notion that nature is like a book spurred a proliferation of books *about* nature, from the philosophical allegories of the goddess Natura, to Christian encyclopedias and moralized bestiaries, medical treatises that aligned the human body with the celestial zodiac, and books of hours and other devotional texts whose illuminations visualized the details of the divine handiwork described in Genesis. Though diverse in their forms and philosophical commitments, these numerous "books of nature" share a fundamentally humanist outlook: human life is not only embedded in but *fitted to* the larger structures and processes of the natural world, an affinity between microcosm and macrocosm that authorizes, establishes rules for, and promises to reward the study of nature. For medieval humanists, nature invites human beings to participate in the work of creation through hermeneutic, artistic, and ethical activity and, in doing so, affords an intimacy between the creature and the transcendent creator.

These principles are exemplified in a miniature from a fifteenth-century manuscript of Jean Corbechon's fourteenth-century French translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus's *De proprietatibus rerum*, a Latin encyclopedia completed about a century earlier (Fig. 0.1). In the first three compartments, the creator measures out the world's dimensions with an architect's compass and then, with a gesture of the hands, fashions the features of its landscape and vegetation. In the fourth compartment, Jean Corbechon presents his translation to his patron, King Charles V of France. The artist's coordination of these events suggests an analogy between divine creativity and human literary production that runs in two directions. First, it suggests that Jean's book-making is like God's world-making, and indeed, that Jean's production of the book is the culmination and fulfillment of God's work; and, conversely, it suggests that God's world-making is like Jean's book-making, that it, too, is an act of translation. The physical world can then be "read" as a divine communiqué, the medium through which God makes himself comprehensible.

This study argues that William Langland's *Piers Plowman* relies on the trope of the book of nature to imagine a recuperated intimacy between



Fig. 0.1 Creation scenes and presentation of the book, from Jean Corbechon's French translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus's *De proprietatibus rerum* London, British Library, Royal 17 E III, f. 9r. By permission of the British Library.

creator and creation. In doing so, it challenges recent critical attention to the poem's discourses of disability and failure and reveals the poem's place in a long and diverse tradition of medieval humanism that originates in the twelfth century and, indeed, points forward to celebrations of nature and natural capacity in later periods. As in the miniature prefacing Jean's translation of Bartholomaeus's encyclopedia, in *Piers Plowman* divine creativity is a warrant for human creativity. Langland gives special expression to this creative partnership in the poem's expansive vocabulary of *kynde*, the Middle English word for "nature," broadly construed, but in an extraordinary coinage, also one of God's names in *Piers Plowman*. The poem's abiding commitment to God's presence in nature, a vision of divine proximity embodied in the figure *Kynde*, suggests that by studying what God has made, human beings fulfill God's initial work through the intertwined practices of interpretive, poetic, and ethical making.

In its articulation of the value of *kynde*, *Piers Plowman* evinces a studied optimism with respect to the moral and ethical guidance that nature provides, as well as a confidence in the human capacity to glean these truths from nature and act on them. The poem's daring vision of natural capacity emerges most fully alongside contextual discourses, including

allegories of the goddess Natura, encyclopedic exemplarism, natural law and legal equity, and the theology of universal salvation. Such discourses make up the many “books of nature” that vied to define the significance of the natural world and marshal its lessons for human life. Because the goddess Natura is Kynde’s nearest formal precursor, contextualizing *Piers Plowman* among the “books of nature” starts with connecting Kynde to the Natura allegories that emerged from twelfth-century humanism. Tracking Natura’s transformations from the twelfth to the fourteenth century throws Kynde into sharp relief and allows us to see how *Piers Plowman* draws out the optimistic tenor of contemporary literary, philosophical, legal, and theological debates on nature and natural capacity. Together these investigations establish a new literary history for *Piers Plowman* through which to engage many of the poem’s most perplexing interpretative problems.

Acknowledgments

When Langland's aspiring pilgrims describe the way to Truth as "a wikkede wey but whoso hadde a gyde," they might as well be talking about the experience of writing a book on *Piers Plowman*. If I have hit upon truth in these pages, it is due in no small measure to the many guides and supporters who have made my way less "wikkede" and, indeed, without whom this project would not have been possible.

My greatest debt is to Jill Mann, who directed my dissertation at the University of Notre Dame and who has been a steadfast source of advice and encouragement. I was Jill's student, in a sense, before I met her. Reading her account of Chaucer's Boethianism in *Feminizing Chaucer* was what first drew me to medieval literature. And so it was my good fortune to find my way to Notre Dame at the same time that she did, becoming her student there on formal terms. A few years later it was Jill, too, who first suggested that I pursue my enthusiasm for *Piers Plowman* and write a dissertation devoted entirely to Langland. The project became more daunting when I realized that my proposed study of *kynde* would lead me into Latin and French contexts and across disciplinary boundaries into philosophical, theological, and legal writing, but Jill's confidence in me gave me courage. I am ever grateful for her incomparable scholarship, her brilliant example, and her patient mentorship over the years.

As I revised from the earliest iterations of this project to its present form, I could have had no greater champion than Elizabeth Allen, my colleague at the University of California, Irvine (UCI). A sympathetic and incisive reader, she offered generous comments on both local arguments and on the book as a whole that helped me clarify my claims and articulate them more boldly. In departmental collaborations and in countless informal conversations during our hikes around University Hills, she has been a thoughtful interlocutor on every subject, a generous mentor, and a dear friend.

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participants in graduate seminars I have taught on *Piers Plowman*, especially Ricardo Matthews, for reading and thinking about the poem with me and for the many insights our conversations generated.

I am tremendously grateful for support from a generous community of Middle English scholars, especially Langlandians whose encouragement made me feel welcome in the field: Andrew Cole, Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Maura Nolan, Elizabeth Robertson, Stephen Shepherd, Fiona Somerset, Emily Steiner, and Lawrence Warner. As members of my dissertation committee at Notre Dame, Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, and Maura Nolan provided vital guidance and advice in the earliest stages of this project. My arguments have been nurtured and improved by discussions with Andrea Denny-Brown, Seeta Chaganti, Shannon Gayk, Elizabeth Keim Harper, Jennifer Jahner, Eleanor Johnson, Michael Johnston, Robyn Malo, Nancy McLoughlin, Mary Raschko, Ellen Ketels Rentz, and Jennifer Sisk. I owe special gratitude to Chris Cannon and Emily Steiner for generous and timely feedback on a late version of the manuscript that helped me to highlight and strengthen many of its central claims and greatly improved its final shape.

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Finally, I wish to thank my family for their love and support during the many years I devoted to this project, especially to my parents and parents-in-law: Ronald and Virginia Davis; Kathleen and Richard Fehr; and Allen and Vivian Kiene. This book is dedicated to Jeremy Kiene, who has been with me every step of the way, who has read and improved every page of this book in all of its iterations, and whose care of creatures great and small exemplifies what it means to be *kynde*.

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Introduction

The Craft of *Kynde*

And al þe myȝt myd hym is in makynge of þynges.

Piers Plowman B.17.169¹

Caeli enarrant gloriam Dei

Et opera manuum eius annuntiat firmamentum

[The heavens shew forth the glory of God,
and the firmament declareth the work of his hands.]

Psalms 18: 2²

In an essay on ineffability in medieval poetry, Barbara Newman observes that to speak of heaven is to speak of God.³ *Piers Plowman* offers no vision of heaven. Aside from a spectacular scene at hell's gates, the poem's setting is distinctly earthbound: the narrator Will's concerns return in successive visions to the original scene of the "fair feeld ful of folk" (B.Pr.17), the worldly "mase" in which questions of the soul's salvation must be negotiated (C.1.6). Nevertheless, *Piers Plowman* has a great deal to say about God. Its representation of God as a craftsman, a "formour and shappere" (B.17.168) who lays hands on his creation, prompts a variation on Newman's dictum: in *Piers Plowman*, to speak of earth is also to speak of God, for Langland's God makes himself manifest in the material world, not only when he appears incarnate as Christ, but in the act of creation itself.

¹ A.V.C. Schmidt, ed., *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C, and Z Versions*, 2 vols (New York: Longman, 1995; Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008), vol. 1. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of the poem are from this edition and citations are given in the text by version, passus, and line.

² All citations of the Vulgate refer to *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, ed. Robert Weber and Roger Gryson, 5th edn. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007). English translations are from the Douay-Rheims version.

³ Newman, "The Artifice of Eternity: Speaking of Heaven in Three Medieval Poems," *Religion and Literature* 37 (2005): p. 1.

The subject of this book is the relationship of divine creativity, poetry, and ethics in *Piers Plowman*. These terms converge in the poem's rich vocabulary of *kynde*, the familiar Middle English word for nature, or creation, broadly construed. But in a remarkable merging of categories, Langland also uses *kynde* to name nature's creator, "þe grete God that gynnyng hadde neuere" (B.9.28), who is a recurring character in *Piers Plowman*.⁴ The stakes of this representation could not be greater: by depicting God as Kynde, that is, under the guise of creation itself, Langland explores the capacity of nature and of language to bear the plenitude of the divine. In doing so, he advances a profound claim for the spiritual value of literary art, including his own searching form of theological poetry.

Kynde first appears as the creative force behind Wit's allegory of the castle *Caro*, the fleshly but dignified home of Dowel and Anima:

'Kynde,' quod Wit, 'is creatour of alle kynnes þynges,
Fader and formour of al þat euere was maked—
And þat is þe grete God that gynnyng hadde neuere,
Lord of lif and of lizt, of lisse and of peyne.' (B.9.26–9)

In a description that evokes the Creator-God of Genesis, Wit establishes Kynde's identity as "þe grete God" (or "god grettest" at C.10.154), the generative father and loving "formour" who shapes the human body, endows it with a soul, and provides a series of defenses to facilitate its safekeeping (B.9.1–54). Kynde makes two additional major appearances in the poem, revealing himself to the narrator in an encyclopedic vision of the realm of nature in B.11 and, in the poem's final act, visiting creation with sickness and death while voicing an ethics of charity, advising the narrator and all those who would be saved to "[l]erne to loue" (B.20.80–109; B.20.208). Taken together, these three appearances express Langland's confidence that the world is inhabited by the divine, who creates and loves it, who participates in it, and who can be known to it not only through the mediations of Christ and the Holy Spirit, but also in his roles as Father and Creator. Moreover, God's intimacy with creation in *kynde* demands and empowers a particular human response to such a world, an obligation made apparent when at the poem's conclusion Kynde offers Will the salvific "craft" of love (B.20.207). As God's craft produces *kynde*, human craft sustains and perpetuates it.

⁴ Although representations of God are rare in medieval literature, God does appear as a character in vernacular hexameral writings and in medieval drama, such as the *Jeu d'Adam* and later Creation plays, but Langland is unique in using *kynde* or nature as a name for God. Mary Clemente Davlin discusses the rarity of embodiments of God in medieval literature in *The Place of God in Piers Plowman and Medieval Art* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 1.

Langland's representation of God as Kynde—and the many complications this representation unfolds—lies at the heart of this study because it signals the magnitude of the poem's investment in the positive value of nature and its spiritual meaning for human life. This introductory chapter begins by examining the semantic range of *kynde* in *Piers Plowman*. While this keyword has garnered considerable attention from Langlandians, they have not always agreed on its value, nor has it always been read in the positive terms that I advance here. Next, I introduce the trope of the book of nature and the allegories of the goddess Natura, the two humanist traditions that this book proposes as models for Langland's distinctive vision of nature's mediatory function. I examine Kynde within this framework as a metapoetical device, a vehicle for exploring how language might capture something of the divine. Finally, I conclude with a reading of Langland's Good Samaritan, whose exchange with Will in B.17 epitomizes this book's central claims about *kynde*, natural capacity, and the intertwined activities of hermeneutic, poetic, and ethical making.

KYNDE CAPACITY

Piers Plowman endows nature with profound moral, ethical, and spiritual import in the poem's rich vocabulary of *kynde*. The insular term encompasses nature in the broadest sense, indicating the cosmos as a whole as well as the inherent qualities of its individual components, persons, animals, plants, and inanimate things. *Kynde* describes bodies—physical forms—as well as their dispositions and instinctive behaviors and desires, including sexual function. But *kynde* also describes the non-physical aspects of human and divine natures, including that of God, Christ, and the soul, to which it assigns a capacity for innate moral and ethical feeling, giving rise to an array of adjectival meanings such as “proper,” “lawful,” “dutiful,” “benevolent,” “loving,” “courteous,” and “noble.”⁵ Developing its etymological basis in the Old English *cynd* (a cognate of *cyn*, meaning “kin” or “people”), the Middle English *kynde* also implies kinship and its obligations. As Andrew Galloway has shown, Langland associates *kyndenesse* with gratitude, suggesting that it is natural—both instinctive and proper—to reciprocate gifts of love and goods, and that, by extension, it is unnatural, indeed *unkynde*, not to do so.⁶ In *Piers Plowman*, *kynde*

⁵ See *MED* s.v. “kinde,” n., 1–15; s.v. “kinde,” adj., 1–6; s.v. “kinde,” adv. See also E.C. Knowlton, “Nature in Middle English,” *JEGP* 20 (1921): pp. 186–207.

⁶ See Andrew Galloway, “The Making of a Social Ethic in Late-Medieval England: From *Gratitudo* to ‘Kyndenesse,’” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 55, no. 3 (1994): pp. 365–83, and

demands love of God and love of neighbor, an ethics of mutual care and support that Langland expands to include entire communities, not only lineal family groups.

Through its associations with kinship, *kynde* makes it possible to envision creation as an interconnected whole linked together by a universal bond of kinship with God, its origin.⁷ When he represents God in his creative role as Kynde, the “Fader and formour,” Langland activates this potential of *kynde* to signify universal kinship and continuity. Indeed, M. Teresa Tavormina defines *kynde* in *Piers Plowman* as the sign of the fundamental similitude between creator and creation, which is made in God’s likeness.⁸ The perpetuation of this likeness, she argues, depends on the institutions of marriage and family life, which Langland sanctifies by using them as metaphors for “his most heartfelt religious beliefs.”⁹ Finally, while *kynde* binds human communities as it binds human beings to their creator, in *Piers Plowman* kinship in *kynde* has a claim on God, too. As Nicholas Watson observes, Langland frames the Redemption with word-play that highlights the demands of kinship when Christ, speaking from the cross near the end of the poem, refuses to be an “vnkynde kyng” (B.18.399): “With a brilliant set of puns on ‘unkynde,’ ‘kyng,’ and ‘kyn,’ Langland fuses Christ’s divine righteousness as king with the mercy he must by nature show his subjects as their kin.”¹⁰ Jill Mann has shown, moreover, that the Redemption depends on God’s experience of *kynde*, not only in terms of the kinship demands that Watson elucidates, but because Langland presents Christ’s Incarnation and Crucifixion as the fulfillment of God’s desire to know his creation: “the appetite for

Hugh White, *Nature and Salvation in Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1988), especially pp. 89–111. Many of White’s examples demonstrate the essential moral goodness of following *kynde* and, conversely, the wickedness of “unkyndenesse,” a term denoting the failure of due gratitude that Langland frequently pairs with “couetise.”

⁷ On *kynde* and kinship with God, see Davlin, “*Kynde Knowyng* as a Major Theme in *Piers Plowman* B,” *Review of English Studies* 22 (1971): pp. 1–19.

⁸ Tavormina, *Kindly Similitude: Marriage and Family in Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995).

⁹ Tavormina, *Kindly Similitude*, p. xii. Tavormina’s work establishes a central paradigm for my own study in revealing the poem’s celebration of dutiful acquiescence to the imperatives of *kynde* as a form of participation in God’s creation.

¹⁰ Watson, “Visions of Inclusion: Universal Salvation and Vernacular Theology in Pre-Reformation England,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27 (1997): p. 159, and see previously Davlin, “*Kynde Knowyng* in *Piers Plowman* B,” pp. 14–15. In “Eating and Drinking in *Piers Plowman*,” *Essays and Studies* 32 (1979): pp. 26–43, Jill Mann demonstrates that in addition to the pull of kinship, Christ is also moved by other laws of *kynde*, for Langland presents the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Redemption as the divine response to a natural appetite, a “thirst” for human souls.

knowledge which drove man to sin drives God to redeem him.”¹¹ In each of these examples, *kynde* is a principle of likeness that binds creation together, provides positive models for human action in the world, serves as a guide to living well and tending God’s creation, and finally underwrites Langland’s soteriology.

Yet alongside Langland’s evident esteem for nature, a more skeptical vision emerges throughout the poem to complicate the value of *kynde*. Although several speakers in the poem affirm that God has arranged nature to sustain every creature—that he is, in fact, “curteis . . . to bestes” (B.13.15)—Langland’s focus continually returns to the interrelated problems of need, suffering, and sin, demanding answers to the disjuncture they represent within nature’s larger harmony.¹² Recent scholarship

¹¹ Mann, “Eating and Drinking,” p. 31, and see further on divine need, Mann, “The Nature of Need Revisited,” *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 18 (2004): pp. 3–29.

¹² The poem’s representation of need and poverty has received much critical attention in recent years and will be relevant to this study as concepts of nature are inextricably bound with provision, production and consumption, the social order, and the embodied experience of privation. On need as a structuring principle in the poem, see Nicolette Zeeman, “The Condition of Kynde,” in *Medieval Literature and Historical Inquiry: Essays in Honor of Derek Pearsall*, ed. David Aers (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 1–30; Mann “Nature of Need”; and Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). On Langland’s sensitivity to the material conditions of poverty, see Derek Pearsall, “Poverty and Poor People in *Piers Plowman*,” in *Medieval English Studies Presented to George Kane*, ed. Edward D. Kennedy, Ronald A. Waldron, and Joseph S. Wittig (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1988), pp. 167–86, and Margaret Kim, “Hunger, Need, and the Politics of Poverty in *Piers Plowman*,” *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 16 (2002): pp. 131–67, who draws attention to the poem’s representation of “poor people . . . in concrete social conditions,” rather than as idealized or merely symbolic figures (p. 131). Anne Scott, *“Piers Plowman” and the Poor* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), examines five types of poverty in the poem, considers their contradictions, and argues that Langland promotes poverty in all its forms as a virtue: “Langland insists that poverty, whether patiently borne, voluntarily chosen or endured as inevitable, has, in itself, the power to save” (p. 114). Wendy Scase, *Piers Plowman and the New Anticlericalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Lawrence M. Clopper, *“Songes of Rechelesnesse”: Langland and the Franciscans* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997); and Aers, *Sanctifying Signs: Making Christian Tradition in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), pp. 99–156, associate the poem’s representation of poverty with antifraternal and Franciscan reformist discourses. On poverty and contemporary labor legislation, see Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity: Writing in England, 1360–1430* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 20–72; Clopper, “Need Men and Women Labor?: Langland’s Wanderer and the Labor Ordinances,” in *Chaucer’s England: Literature in Historical Context*, ed. Barbara Hanawalt (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis Press, 1992), pp. 110–29; and Anne Middleton, “Acts of Vagrancy: The C-Version Autobiography and the Statute of 1388,” in *Written Work: Langland, Labor, and Authorship*, ed. Steven Justice and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), pp. 208–317. Kate Crassons, *The Claims of Poverty: Literature, Culture, and Ideology in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), pp. 21–88, draws attention to the instability of the concept of poverty and the difficulties of discerning need in *Piers Plowman*.

has illuminated the role of this privative aspect of *kynde* in the poem, demonstrating its effect as a stimulus to individual and social reform, a spur to restorative ethical action, and a mechanism by which God draws his creation nearer to him.¹³ In its negative sense, *kynde* is frequently associated with the narrator's compulsive desire for knowledge, a concept expressed in the poem by the collocation "kynde knowynge." Often glossed as experiential or innate knowledge—as opposed to book-learning or facts handed down from authorities—the phrase first appears in passus 1 and recurs sporadically throughout the poem to signal Will's desire for deeper understanding, a firmer grasp on some truth he acknowledges but cannot quite claim. "Kynde knowynge" thus points to the paradox of human knowledge and, indeed, to the paradox of *kynde* that this book investigates: invariably expressed as a deficiency (e.g. "Yet haue I no kynde knowynge," B.1.138), the knowledge that Will desires can be obtained and, in fact, can *only* be obtained "kyndely," that is, in the experience of created life.¹⁴ For as Holy Church admonishes him, "kynde knowynge" is an innate capacity to know truth that "kenneþ in þyn herte/ For to louen þi Lord leuere þan þiselue" and "[n]o dedly synne to do" (B.1.142–4). Holy Church's claim could be construed as an optimistic celebration of natural capacity since, she seems to suggest, human beings are equipped with the means to know truth "kyndely," for their very hearts instruct them to love their creator and, therefore, to avoid sin (B.1.143–4). And yet, as Will's refrain suggests, having the capacity to know truth "kyndely" does not guarantee one's recognition of that truth, much less that he or she will act in accord with it.

Nicolette Zeeman's work offers the most comprehensive account of the deficiency of the natural order in *Piers Plowman*, revealing numerous instances in which *kynde* "alludes to states of denial, neediness, insecurity, risk, sin—and the suffering associated with them."¹⁵ In *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, Zeeman's psychoanalytical model

¹³ Davlin, Mann, and Zeeman each promote a recuperative view of natural lack, illuminating the ways in which the suffering that attends creaturely life is spiritually educative in *Piers Plowman*. See Davlin, "Kynde Knowynge as a Major Theme"; Mann, "Eating and Drinking" and "Nature of Need"; and Zeeman, "'Studying' in the Middle Ages—and in *Piers Plowman*," *New Medieval Literatures* 3 (1999): pp. 185–212; "The Condition of Kynde"; and *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*.

¹⁴ Langland emphasizes the particularly creaturely quality of this knowledge by depicting God's own desire for "kynde knowynge" as his motivation for taking "Adames kynde" in the Incarnation (B.18.221). As Davlin, "Kynde Knowynge as a Major Theme," observes, the desire for *kynde* knowledge "motivates not only Will's journey but the journey in which love leaped down into this low earth" (p. 13). On divine need and Langland's soteriology, see Mann, "Eating and Drinking," and "Nature of Need."

¹⁵ Zeeman, "The Condition of Kynde," p. 3. Also see Zeeman, "'Studying' in the Middle Ages," and *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*.

emphasizes the connection between natural lack and generative desire, describing the narrator's experience of insufficiency and loss as the catalyst that drives the poem's distinctly reiterative action. For Zeeman, the privative aspect of *kynde* is productive, both in terms of poetic form and in terms of the spiritual gains to be had by enduring the suffering intrinsic to natural experience, which is "both a 'good' and yet also a site of potential deprivation, a place of 'having' and 'not having.'" ¹⁶ Zeeman's learned book charts a course between these two views of nature, bringing to bear on Langland's poem the medieval discourses of nature's revelatory and *negatively* revelatory power, which she relates to the Stoic concept of knowledge through oppositions: "the divine is that which is absent or lacking." ¹⁷ But her emphasis on the negative aspects of nature, though valuable, finally underestimates the human capacity for interpretive and ethical action in the world that Langland's positive treatment of *kynde* not only empowers but demands.

In an essay that argues that *Piers Plowman* is designed to make its readers fail, D. Vance Smith takes an extreme position on the negative value of *kynde*, which he locates as the essential ground of that failure. Smith argues that the poem "not only engenders negativity but . . . is deeply formed by negation." ¹⁸ The poem's repeated turns outward—"to the sphere of practical action"—are framed, Smith observes, by a "complicated critique of the phenomenal world and the language we use in and for it." ¹⁹ That interrogation of representation, both in terms of what the natural world represents to us and how we can go about describing it, is a question at the center of my own study, and Smith is right to characterize Langland's approach as skeptical. But Smith's claim that Langland's view is apophatic rests on a limited appreciation of the figure Kynde and its mediatory work in the poem. For Smith, Kynde is a chief example of God's ineffability:

Piers Plowman describes God in terms—or to be precise, in the absence of terms—that concern the great subject of negative theology: the unknowability of the ultimate causes of things. One of the poem's names for God is Kynde, a nature that is the cause of nature, yet is not 'kynde' in the sense that we know it because it does not have a cause itself. ²⁰

¹⁶ Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, p. 157.

¹⁷ Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, p. 187. Zeeman acknowledges that negatively revelatory interpretations of nature do not "necessarily involve the discourses of disgust and repudiation found in some forms of 'contemptus mundi' literature" (p. 187).

¹⁸ D. Vance Smith, "Negative Langland," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 23 (2009): p. 39.

¹⁹ Smith, "Negative Langland," p. 56.

²⁰ Smith, "Negative Langland," p. 56.

Smith reads this paradox—that Langland calls *kynde* what can never be *kynde*—as evidence that the figure Kynde is a vehicle for demonstrating the failure of language to describe God, that, in fact, this failure is a kind of success because it indicates the only real knowledge we can have about God, which is that he is “no thing,” an apophatic view indeed. Smith thus articulates the “negatively revelatory” potential of *kynde*: as Zeeman puts it, “[c]reation points to that which is outside it, the divinity that it cannot contain.”²¹ In theological terms, this must be true. Nature cannot “contain” divinity, just as Kynde is only one of God’s names in the poem, as I discuss below.

But in defining *kynde* narrowly as “that which has a cause,” Smith limits *kynde* in ways that Langland expressly does not and therefore minimizes the poem’s theologically imaginative account of the creator’s presence in creation. When Wit identifies Kynde as “þe grete God” (B.9.28), for example, he audaciously overloads the word *kynde*, tasking it with designating both creator and creation, cause and effect, a concept that orthodox medieval theologians would undoubtedly mark as a category error. Indeed, thirteenth-century scholasticism devised a terminology precisely to firm up this vital distinction while still observing the connection between God and his creation: God, the uncreated creator, is *natura naturans*, the active nature who “natures,” while creation is *natura naturata*, the passive nature that is “natured” by God.

A.V.C. Schmidt first observed the aptness of the scholastic concept as a gloss for Wit’s description of Kynde. As Schmidt suggests, Kynde is “Nature’s creator” (*natura naturans*) not “created Nature” (*natura naturata*).²² This distinction is certainly implied in Langland’s use of the word *kynde* as a name for God, but unlike the scholastic terminology, *kynde* remains unrestricted in Langland’s usage, that is, Langland uses the same word to name both creator and creation. A chief goal of this book is to bring to critical discussion the ways that Langland’s representation of God as Kynde both evokes and violates the scholastic distinction. While the *natura naturans/naturata* terminology tempers the continuity produced by its repetition of *natura* through the variation and implied hierarchy of its participles—one active, one passive—*kynde* does not enforce those distinctions. Rather, as a point of connection between divinity and humanity, *kynde* is an open conduit for movement in both directions, or, to put this in terms more suited to Langland’s dynamic allegory, *kynde* becomes

²¹ Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, p. 187.

²² Schmidt, ed., *The Vision of Piers Plowman: A Critical Edition of the B-Text Based on Trinity College Cambridge MS B.15.17* (London: J.M. Dent, 1995), p. 439. I discuss this terminology further in Chapter 2.

the material ground of communion between the two ontologies of creator and creation. A major implication of this book's argument about Kynde, then, is that Langland's personifications of the divine give ordinary language an extraordinary capacity to refer to spiritual things, a claim that lays the foundation for his own theological poetry.

Ultimately, Wit's response to the narrator's query—"What kynnes þyng is Kynde?"—is not in fact that Kynde is no "kynnes þyng," as Smith suggests, but rather that Kynde is "*creatour* of alle kynnes þynges" (B.9.25–6, my emphasis). In highlighting Kynde's identity as "creatour," Langland not only avoids negation, but emphasizes creation. Wit reveals that "alle kynnes þynges" are vitally connected to their "kynde" maker, that they are, in this sense, *Kynde's things*, and so are both an expression of God and legible as such. A point of contact in the poem between creation and its creator, between the made and unmade, between lack and plenitude, Langland's expansive conception of *kynde* describes a *via positiva*, an advisedly optimistic account of natural capacity that persists alongside the poem's darker expressions of doubt and deficiency in the natural realm. Although studies like those of Zeeman and Smith have elucidated Langland's concerns with failure and lack, they have underplayed the degree to which Langland's positive representation of nature is essential to *Piers Plowman's* ethical poetics, for Langland suggests that it is possible to inspire ethical action not only in response to privation but on the model of God's *kynde* fullness, too.

THE BOOK OF NATURE AND THE GODDESS NATURA

To understand Langland's abiding investment in the positive value of *kynde*, the fullness and expressivity that suggest its suitability as a name for God, this study looks to Neoplatonic models that attest the continuity between creator and creation. One of these, as discussed in this book's Preface, is the medieval trope of the *liber naturae*, an idea that develops biblical metaphors like Psalms 45: 2, which describes God's tongue as a pen, and Revelations 6: 14, which compares the heavens to a book.²³

²³ Ernst Robert Curtius surveys the trope of the book of nature in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask, 7th ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 319–26. Jesse M. Gellrich further explores the biblical and patristic sources of this ubiquitous trope in *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology, and Fiction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), especially pp. 29–35.

The trope was a favorite of twelfth-century Neoplatonists like Hugh of St. Victor, who famously conceives of the natural world as a “*liber . . . scriptus digito Dei*” [a book written by the finger of God], an analogue of Moses’ tablets, which were said to be written by the finger of God in Exodus 31: 18.²⁴ Alan of Lille extends the analogy in his triad: “*Omnis mundi creatura/ Quasi liber et pictura/ Nobis est et speculum*” [Every creature in the world is like a book and picture and mirror to us].²⁵ Alan’s formulation in particular emphasizes nature’s legibility: creation is a source of knowledge “*nobis*,” in the dative case, given *to us*, for the express purpose of revelation. The idea of the book of nature epitomizes the theory of nature’s spiritual value known as exemplarism: it imagines the world as a symbolic book made on the model of an exemplar, the “copy-text” of God’s own mind.²⁶ In contrast to the negatively revelatory view that postlapsarian nature is ultimately and irrevocably defined by privation and absence, the idea of the book of nature expresses the cataphatic alternative to apophysis: nature *does* reveal its creator, and not only through negation, but chiefly in the order, beauty, and plenitude of the created world.

Langland twice engages the trope of the book of nature and its exemplarist underpinnings in an overt way. We see it first in B.11 when Kynde sets the narrator atop a mountain called Myddelerpe, a vantage point conferring an encyclopedic view of creation.²⁷ Kynde does not fully materialize as an interlocutor here, but fades into the background, or,

²⁴ Hugh of St Victor, *De tribus diebus*, ed. Dominic Poirel, CCCM 177 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 4: 94–104.

²⁵ Alan of Lille, *Rhythmus alter*, PL 210, 579A.

²⁶ Augustine affirms nature’s status as a book parallel, but ultimately subordinate, to Scripture in *Ennarrationes in Psalmos* 45: 7: “*Liber tibi sit pagina diuina, ut haec audias; liber tibi sit orbis terrarum, ut haec uideas. In istis codicibus non ea legunt, nisi qui litteras nouerunt; in toto mundo legat et idiota.*” CCSL 38 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1956). On Augustinian sign theory and the book of nature, see Gellrich, *Idea of the Book*, pp. 113–15, and on Augustine’s role in extending the allegorical interpretation of Scripture to the natural world, see Jon Whitman, *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), especially pp. 77–83, 126–8. Although medieval exemplarism originates with Augustine, the Franciscan philosopher and theologian Bonaventure gives it fullest expression in the thirteenth century, mounting a Neoplatonic critique of Aristotle’s rejection of transcendent form. See Christopher M. Cullen, *Bonaventure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 71–7. Daniel Murtaugh, “*Piers Plowman*” and the *Image of God* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1978), pp. 15–21, and Lawrence M. Clopper, “*Songes of Rechelesnesse*,” pp. 105–44, explore the influence of exemplarism on Langland’s poetry, and it is the focus of Chapter 3 below.

²⁷ Gillian Rudd also describes this episode as an example of Langland’s engagement with the trope. See “Thinking through Earth in Langland’s *Piers Plowman* and the Harley Lyric ‘Erthe toc of erthe,’” *Ecocriticism* 8, no. 2 (2003): pp. 137–49, and *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 185–201.

better yet, *becomes* the background. For even as the personification recedes—perhaps precisely *because* he recedes—the whole scene of *kynde* remains identified with God its creator. The purpose of the vision, as the narrator understands it, is to learn “[t]horuȝ ech a creature, Kynde my creatour to louye” (B.11.325). Creation itself, each of Kynde’s creatures, becomes the vehicle of divine self-revelation. Ideally, by witnessing these “ensaumples,” by the mediation of the natural world (“[t]horuȝ” nature), the narrator will come “to knowe” and “to louye” its maker.

The trope of the book of nature reemerges in B.18 when a figure called Book explains the natural phenomena that accompany Christ’s birth and death. The physical elements, Book says, “beren witnesse” to the God who “wroȝte” or made them, a clever wordplay on the near homophony of “wroȝte” and “wrot,” the past tense of “writan,” meaning “to write” (B.18.236–7). As in the previous example, Book’s testimony in B.18 articulates the continuity between creator and creation that is summarized in Langland’s poetics of *kynde*. In neither of these two episodes, however, are the meaning and value of natural phenomena readily apparent to those who observe them. Will’s observation of nature does not lead him to love of its creator—at least not directly—and the natural phenomena of B.18 spark a spirited debate about their significance.

This book argues that interpreting the book of nature is one of *Piers Plowman*’s most urgent concerns. It is a task that motivates Langland’s poetic “makynge” and gives them moral weight, for Langland suggests that the interpretation of nature can be an ethical act—indeed, a work of charity—that fulfills nature’s potential by drawing out its spiritual meaning.²⁸ Anne Middleton has described *Piers Plowman* as a “poetics of interposition,” an interrogation of traditional authority that produces a new kind of poetry “grounded . . . in first person worldly experience.”²⁹ As such, the poem proceeds as a series of staged conflicts between natural knowledge and institutional knowledge as the narrator attempts to interpolate himself into a world to which he arrives belatedly, “an abashed interloper in a stern pantheon of serious genres and clerical modes of

²⁸ My argument here agrees with Michelle Karnes’s claim in *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011) that the poem’s inner dreams demonstrate Will’s need “to learn the art of Christian interpretation” (p. 192). “What most concerns Langland,” she writes, “is how to make the transition from natural knowledge, the knowledge that the individual attains through the natural faculties of sense and reason, to what we might call spiritual understanding, that is, understanding created things as they pertain to God” (p. 188).

²⁹ Middleton, “Narration and the Invention of Experience: Episodic Form in *Piers Plowman*,” in *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English Literature in Honor of Morton W. Bloomfield*, ed. Larry D. Benson and Siegfried Wenzel (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1982), p. 111.

discourse.”³⁰ Borrowing Frank Kermode’s distinction between myth and fiction, Middleton aligns Langland’s art with the latter, claiming that Langland turns personal experience into a viable subject matter for poetry precisely by acknowledging the limitations of its truth-claims. He does not aspire to the timeless authority of myth, but instead uses fiction “for finding things out . . . [to] make sense of the here and now.”³¹ In this book, I argue that the alternative textuality of the natural world—*kynde*—is another ground of Langland’s fictive “sense-making”: *Piers Plowman* “makes sense of” the relationship of God and nature from the human perspective. *Piers Plowman* is, then, in part, the record of Langland’s reading of the book of nature, which is to say, his attempt to come to terms with nature’s meaning and to make that meaning legible through the “sense-making” device of allegory.

The trope of the book of nature describes the world as an expression of its creator and, accordingly, as a place where careful readers can uncover spiritual sense. I propose that Langland found a provocative literary model for this allegorical “sense-making” in another Neoplatonic figure, the goddess Natura who first appears in the philosophical poetry associated with the twelfth-century school of Chartres. Indeed, for medieval as well as medievalist audiences, Langland’s representation of nature’s divinity in *Kynde* evokes a horizon of expectation, pointing to the long history of personifying nature in medieval Latin and vernacular poetry, a tradition that Chaucer celebrates in the *Parliament of Fowls* when the “noble goddesse Nature” presides over an avian mating ceremony on St. Valentine’s Day. While other readers have acknowledged Langland’s “possible indebtedness” to this tradition, or even simply assumed the connection, no one has yet considered *Kynde*’s resemblance to Natura at any length.³² This

³⁰ Middleton, “Narration and the Invention of Experience,” pp. 110–11.

³¹ In *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), Kermode writes: “Myth operates within the diagrams of ritual, which presupposes total and adequate explanation of things as they are and were; it is a sequence of radically unchangeable gestures. Fictions are for finding things out, and they change as the needs of sense-making change . . . Myths call for absolute, fictions for conditional assent. Myths make sense in terms of a lost order of time; fictions, if successful, make sense of the here and now, *hoc tempus*” (p. 39). Quoted in Middleton, “Narration and the Invention of Experience,” p. 120.

³² See White, *Nature and Salvation*, p. 2. White’s book-length treatment of *kynde* eschews contextual study on these terms: “Langland is very much his own writer, and though it is possible to suggest a provenance for some of his notions, this kind of endeavour very soon exposes one to the risk (and temptation) of imposing the shape of alien contexts on Langland’s text” (p. 2). White’s excellent second book, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness in a Medieval Literary Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), traces the moral value of nature across a broad range of medieval discourses, dedicating chapters to Middle English pastoral writing and religious polemic, Gower, and Chaucer, but again excludes Langland from this larger context. Similarly, in his introduction to the 2002 reprint edition of *The*

book proposes that reading *Piers Plowman* in relation to the Chartrian context and its legacy is essential to understanding Kynde's fullest theological and literary implications. As with so many of Langland's presumed sources, it is indeed difficult if not impossible to establish direct evidence of his knowledge of them; however, the sophistication of the poem's allegorical techniques suggests Langland's familiarity with the major Latin and vernacular allegorical narratives, which are, not coincidentally, also key sources of ideas about nature and divinity, including Boethius's *De consolazione Philosophiae*, Alan of Lille's *De planctu Naturae*, and the *Roman de la Rose*.³³

In the Latin allegorical tradition inaugurated by Bernard Silvestris and Alan of Lille, Natura is *vicaria dei*, God's deputy on earth and superintendent of God's creation. Natura embodies the ideals of twelfth-century Neoplatonic humanism, which understands the created universe as an integrated and ordered expression of its divine source and, moreover, a

Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972; reprint, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), George D. Economou briefly notes that *Piers Plowman*, "[has] joined the ranks of medieval English poems commonly perceived to be related to [the Natura] tradition," but the book does not include Langland in its analysis (p. xi). One notable exception to the critical reluctance to do more than speculate about the relationship between *Piers Plowman* and the Chartrian tradition is Isabel Davis, "*Piers Plowman* and the *Querelle* of the *Rose*: Marriage, *Caritas*, and the Peacock's 'Pennies,'" *New Medieval Literatures* 10 (2008): pp. 49–86. Davis argues that Langland's representation of sexual ethics articulates a response to the *Roman de la Rose* and its sources that anticipates the literary debate it provoked in the fifteenth century. Langland's celebration of marriage, Davis claims, replaces the attention to same-sex desire in the *Roman* and in Alan's *De planctu*. Davis's study reveals the value of reading *Piers Plowman* alongside the Natura tradition, though she concludes that Langland engages its themes chiefly in order to "expose it to criticism" (p. 70).

³³ On the difficulty of determining Langland's sources and some attempts to establish them, see Judson Boyce Allen, "Langland's Reading and Writing: Detractor and the Pardon Passus," *Speculum* 59 (1984): pp. 342–62; Andrew Galloway, "*Piers Plowman* and the Schools," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 6 (1992): pp. 89–107; John A. Alford, "Langland's Learning," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 9 (1995): pp. 1–17; and Christopher Cannon, "Langland's *Ars Grammatica*," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 22 (2008): pp. 3–25. The influence of secular poetry and philosophical allegory on *Piers Plowman* remains understudied, in part due to Langland's lack of overt citation of these potential sources. On the French influence, see Dorothy L. Owen, *Piers Plowman: A Comparison with Some Earlier and Contemporary French Allegories* (London: University of London Press, 1912). Galloway considers Langland's debts to Guillaume Deguileville's *Pèlerinage* and the *Roman de la Rose* in *The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman: C Prologue–Passus 4; B Prologue–Passus 4; A Prologue–Passus 4*, ed. Stephen A. Barney and others, 2 vols to date (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006–), vol. 1 (2006), pp. 150–6. See also Curtis R.H. Jirsa, "*Piers Plowman*'s Lyric Poetics," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 26 (2012): pp. 77–110, and Emily Steiner, who explores the influence of Boethian *metra* and the *Pèlerinage* in *Reading Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 22–38. Steiner's chapter on "Learning" (*Reading Piers Plowman*, pp. 96–139) discusses the poem's thematization of learning and its citation of learned texts and authorities.

knowable cosmos, the study of which yields knowledge of its creator and moral guidance for human life. Examining Kynde in this context reveals, on the one hand, deep continuities between Natura and Kynde, while, on the other hand, it suggests that certain features of the Natura tradition, especially in its later, vernacular adaptations, rendered the figure inadequate to Langland's radical vision of divine proximity in Kynde. Like *Piers Plowman*, the Latin allegorical tradition and its vernacular adaptations imagine the divine at work in nature, but, in contrast to Kynde's conflation of creator and creation, Natura carefully affirms the theologically mandated distinction between terms—indeed, Natura was *invented* to bracket the divine.³⁴ Such a worldview serves the developing science of natural philosophy from the middle of the twelfth century on. Even before the influx of Aristotelian texts in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, the Neoplatonic humanism that engendered the Natura allegories encourages rationalistic study of the autonomous causes that sustain the created world.³⁵ By setting God at a remove from nature, philosophers could engage in speculative science without fear of intruding onto the divine prerogative. The Natura allegories thus served the philosophical and literary interests of their authors and could be adapted to diverse ends in later centuries, as demonstrated by vernacular versions of the figure, among which I include Langland's Kynde. In contrast to other vernacular adaptations of the goddess, which increasingly limit Natura's concern to secular and sexual matters, Kynde recuperates Natura's diminished divinity and, in its affirmation that nature encloses or points toward spiritual truths, reinstates the Neoplatonic transcendence of the earlier tradition, this time not by elevating nature but by bringing God to earth.

In reading Kynde in relation to Natura, I present the figure as an outlier to Barbara Newman's study of allegorical goddesses in the writings of Christian poets, mystics, and theologians. These figures, she argues, offer writers "a safe space" to speculate about God "under cover of *fabula*."³⁶ By representing aspects of the divine, allegorical goddesses enable Christian writers to "analyze God's inner conflicts, so to speak," just as personification

³⁴ Winthrop Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century: The Literary Influence of the School of Chartres* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), describes the "scientific Platonism" that gave rise to the philosophically enabling concept of an "autonomous 'Nature'" (p. 34).

³⁵ On the development of a "scientific sensibility" toward nature prior to the recovery of Aristotle, see Brian Stock, *Myth and Science in the Twelfth Century: A Study of Bernard Silvester* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), and Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century*, trans. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 102–19.

³⁶ Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 39.

allegory in the tradition of Prudentius's *Psychomachia* explores the complexity of human psychology.³⁷ The figures that Newman discusses all fall under the rubric of Platonic or Realist personifications as distinct from Aristotelian ones. Platonic personifications are treated as "epiphanies or emanations of a superior reality," while Aristotelian personifications are "personified only for the sake of analytical clarity."³⁸ Platonic personifications—a category to which Newman assigns Natura—can be identified by the following attributes:

the figure's centrality to the conceptual scheme of the text; expressions of awe, love, and reverence on the part of the narrator; the appropriation of biblical and liturgical language to give the figure a numinous aura; the predominantly serious, rather than ironic or parodic, character of the figure's discourse; and perhaps most important, the presumption of an intimate relationship between the figure and God.³⁹

Moreover, Newman adds, Platonic personifications are almost exclusively female figures: "[m]ale personifications are virtually never of the type that I have called Platonic or Realistic."⁴⁰ In the case of Natura, she admits, Jean de Meun's "parody" and Chaucer's "playfulness" in the later tradition present an exception to the rule of reverence surrounding Platonic personifications, but since Natura was already so well established, Newman argues, "even in their hands the goddess retains some of her aura."⁴¹

Aside from the anomaly of the figure's masculinity, Kynde satisfies all of the criteria that Newman attributes to Platonic personifications, but because she rightly regards Kynde as one of Langland's names for God, the figure, by definition, falls outside the bounds of her study.⁴² As Newman argues, personifications in this category are almost always "described either as goddesses or as brides or daughters of God."⁴³ Kynde signals an even closer identification with God, a position that I propose Langland stakes out in order to recuperate the transcendent value of nature as the goddess Natura becomes steadily more earthbound, and more Aristotelian, in the vernacular tradition, a trajectory this book traces in Chapter 1. I do not mean to suggest that Newman's exclusion of Kynde from her study is an oversight, but rather that reading Kynde

³⁷ Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, p. 39.

³⁸ Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, p. 34.

³⁹ Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, pp. 34–5.

⁴⁰ Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, p. 36.

⁴¹ Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, p. 36.

⁴² Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, p. 17. Newman identifies Holy Church and Piers as examples of Platonic personifications in *Piers Plowman* (p. 34).

⁴³ Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, p. 35.

alongside Newman's pantheon suggests just how great a challenge Kynde poses to our critical framework. If, as Wit attests, Kynde is "þe grete God that gynnyng hadde neuere" (B.9.28), then the figure would indeed seem not to be *separate enough* from God to be considered a theophany of the order of Natura, Dame Wisdom, or Lady Holy Church. With respect to Kynde, the required "presumption of an intimate relationship between the figure and God" is seen as *too* intimate, a nearness that is, of course, aggravated—or, from another perspective, underscored—by Kynde's masculine gender. But if it is clear that Kynde does not fit within Newman's category of the female theophany, neither will it suffice to say that Kynde simply *is* God, for, of course, Kynde is a representation, too.

By overlooking Kynde's complicated status as a representation of divinity, critics miss the opportunity to explore one of Langland's most daring claims to the potential and value of literary art. To the contrary, I will argue that, like Newman's goddesses, Kynde is also a poetic vehicle, or "safe space," for speculating about God's nature and, in this case, about God's relationship *to* nature. Because Kynde attempts a more direct representation of God than the goddess figures—more metonymy than metaphor—it challenges both our poetic and theological categories. But the more we contextualize Kynde, the more we are able to recognize that, like Newman's goddesses, and especially like its Latinate counterpart Natura, Kynde is a *figura*, a poetic device that explores the boundaries of representation, asking what we can come to know about God through created things, that is, through both divine and human makings.

DIVINE NAMES

In each of three major appearances in the poem, Kynde's presence becomes, in one sense, progressively more immediate. Readers first learn about Kynde in a flashback of sorts when Wit teaches Will about the origins of the castle *Caro*, the flesh of the body, naming Kynde as its creator. Here Wit speaks *about* Kynde; later, Kynde materializes as an actor and interlocutor in the present time of the poem. But this growing immediacy in terms of narrative finally collapses into Kynde's larger allegorical and theological significance *as a mediation*. In depicting God in the guise of a character called Kynde (rather than as a character called God), Langland draws attention to mediated forms of knowledge. Kynde, then, is a vehicle for exploring the idea that nature mediates an encounter with its creator, a claim that is at once a measured recognition of the limitations of human perception—God cannot be experienced directly—and an almost ecstatically hopeful expression of divine proximity.

But as I have begun to suggest, Kynde is more than an argument about nature: its subject is, in a larger sense, the mediatory capacity of language, in particular, figurative or poetic language. In assigning Kynde's introduction to Wit, Langland announces Kynde's status as an invention, a figure of understanding, even a product of his own poetic craft. In one sense, Kynde's association with Wit rubs away some of the figure's Platonic "aura," implying Langland's admission that Kynde is an Aristotelian figure, as Newman describes them, "personified only for the sake of analytical clarity."⁴⁴ I propose, however, that Langland's assignment of the figure to Wit does not demystify Kynde but rather does the opposite. Kynde becomes a metapoetical figure, a vehicle for exploring how language and figures *do* capture something of the divine.

The meaning of *wit* varies widely in Middle English, ranging from an indication of generalized mental capacity, to equivalence with the highest faculty of reason, to the lower faculties of skill and sensory perception.⁴⁵ In B.15 Wit is one of Anima's many names, designating a faculty defined as the "welle of alle craftes" (B.15.30). That Wit's association with craft suggests a domain limited to *praxis* does not necessarily diminish the figure's stature, however, for in B.19, a speaker of no less authority than Grace claims "alle craftes" as his gift to humankind (B.19.255), and in the poem's final passus, Kynde names love as the supreme craft (B.20.207–8). Moreover, love and craft are united in Kynde's actions from the start. In Wit's introduction, Kynde forms the human body of earth and air "wittily enioyned" to wind and water (B.9.4–5). After constructing the body as a stronghold, Wit continues, "Kynde hap closed þerinne craftily wiþalle/ A lemman þat he loueþ lik to hymselfue" (B.9.5–6). Wit presents the creation of human beings in tangible rather than abstract terms, representing God, in the guise of Kynde, as a craftsman whose loving act of "werkmanshipe" joins body to soul (B.9.45). This nexus of terms—wit, craft, *kynde*, love—adumbrates the vital correlation between divine creativity and human creativity that is the subject of this book. God makes things—"wittily," "craftily"—because he loves, and he loves what he

⁴⁴ Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, p. 34.

⁴⁵ See *MED* s.v. "wit," n., 1–4. On the meaning and relationship of the poem's personifications of Wit, Kynde Wit, and Inwit, see Randolph Quirk, "Langland's Use of *Kind Wit* and *Inwit*," *JEGP* 52 (1953): pp. 182–8; Britton J. Harwood, "Langland's *Kynde Wit*," *JEGP* 75, no. 3, (1976): pp. 330–6; and White, *Nature and Salvation*, pp. 3–40, who describes a diminishment of the term *kynde wit* over the course of the poem, which, he argues, increasingly emphasizes the insufficiency of natural capacity. See also Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition*, especially pp. 188–98. Karnes describes Wit, like his precursor Thought, as a natural faculty that falters in theological matters and, through a series of failed attempts to prioritize natural knowledge, must gradually come under the governance of clergy. Karnes does not discuss the implications of Wit's introduction of Kynde.

makes. When, near the poem's conclusion, Will cries out to Kynde, asking him which "craft" is best to learn, Kynde passes the creative torch, as it were, urging Will to "[l]erne to loue . . . and leef alle opere" (B.20.207–8). Love, Kynde teaches, *is* a craft: it is, in fact, the craft of *kynde*. Insofar as Kynde is a craftsman, a "formour" who fashions the thing that metonymically names him, *kynde* is both a product and a craft, a process of *ongoing* cultivation that requires the participation of all those who by definition claim a share in its meaning.

Langland does employ other names for God in *Piers Plowman* in addition to Kynde, including traditional epithets such as "Our Lord" (B.1.91) and "Oure Saueour" (B.5.479).⁴⁶ The divine is also figured as Truth and as Love, with the former term typically suggesting God the Father and the latter suggesting Christ, the divine Son who is an expression of the Father's love. Both of these figures share some qualities with Kynde, and yet Langland treats neither term as consistently as he uses Kynde as a divine marker. Holy Church's opening speech, for example, identifies Truth as the inhabitant of the high tower that the narrator had observed in the Prologue. Even here, however, in the poem's earliest representation of God, the divine is hardly a distant tower dweller: Holy Church's description of Truth as the "Fader of feiþ" who "formed yow alle" anticipates Wit's later designation of Kynde as "Fader and formour," uniting the two figures as expressions of God's paternal and creatorly intimacy (B.1.14, B.9.27). In general, however, Truth as a name for God implies a rather less accessible deity than Kynde implies. Truth also indicates God in Holy Church's description of the Trinity enthroned in heaven (B.1.133); in her designation of Truth as the most precious treasure (B.1.137); when Piers claims that he labors for Truth (B.5.532–55); and when Truth sends Piers a pardon (B.7.1). In each of these instances, Truth remains a *reported* personification and, residing elsewhere, achieves his effects in the world through intermediaries—Holy Church, Piers, and ecclesiastical documents. Truth, moreover, is not reserved to designate the godhead exclusively: for example, in B.18 Truth is one of the four daughters of God, a theophany to be sure, but one that sets the Father at a distance rather than embodying God *in propria persona* (B.18.119).

⁴⁶ Davlin discusses God's various names in *Place of God*, pp. 6, 161–70. She notes that Truth is "God's chief name in the poem," used over fifty times by her count (p. 161, n. 20). White offers another perspective on Langland's use of Truth as a name for God in his observation that over the course of the poem Kynde and Love replace Truth as names for God, a trend that corresponds to the supersession of the Old Law by the New Law. See White, *Nature and Salvation*, pp. 84–6.

Love is the other term that Langland frequently uses to allegorize the divine, but in contrast to Truth and Kynde, which are associated with God in the person of the Father, Love embodies the qualities usually associated with Christ. In the poem's first passus, for example, Holy Church describes Love as a "meene," or intermediary, like the mayor who stands between the King and the commons, and later Love is "leche of lif and next Oure Lord selue" (B.1.160, 204). Both descriptions imagine Love as an embodied figure of reconciliation analogous to Christ the Son's intercessory position between God the Father and his creation. Moreover, B.12 imagines Christ's Incarnation as Love's leap from heaven to earth (B.12.140–2), and in B.18, Love figures a male suitor who sends Peace letters proclaiming human salvation (B.18.168, 182). In each of these instances, Christ, as Love, performs a vital task of mediation, bridging the gap between the divine and the human, an act imagined in various secular terms including the political (as a mayor), corporeal (as the "leche" who heals the wounded human *caro*), affective (by "leaping" into Mary's womb), courtly (as Peace's lover), and documentary (revealing divine love in the form of letters). As with Truth, however, Langland uses the term Love flexibly: in B.13, for example, Love is gendered female when Patience declares that he learned the definition of Dowel from a "lemman þat [he] louede: Loue was hir name" (B.13.140). The male lover of Peace is the female lover of Patience. The essential content of the term Love remains the same as when it more directly represents Christ, but the form of that representation changes.⁴⁷

Langland's shifting treatment of Truth and Love reflects the poem's characteristically loose handling of allegorical personifications, even those whose divine associations it has already established. As Jill Mann observes in a study of the poem's distinctive allegorical method, Langland does not limit himself to a "fixed list of personified figures." Instead the poem's "personifications are constantly coming to be and passing away, arising out of ordinary language and subsiding into it," with the effect that the reader is made "constantly aware that abstract nouns represent real, if invisible, agents in the world, interacting with (or through) human beings

⁴⁷ Love is also one of many names given to the unconventionally male Anima (see B.15.34). On Langland's loose handling of gender expectations, see Helen Cooper, "Gender and Personification in *Piers Plowman*," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 5 (1991): pp. 31–48. On Anima's gender switching, see James Paxson, "Gender Personified, Personification Gendered, and the Body Figuralized in *Piers Plowman*," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 12 (1998): pp. 65–96; Masha Raskolnikov, "Promising the Female, Delivering the Male: Transformations of Gender in *Piers Plowman*," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 19 (2005): pp. 81–105; and Elizabeth Robertson, "Souls that Matter: Gender and the Soul in *Piers Plowman*," in *Mindful Spirit in Late Medieval Literature: Essays in Honor of Elizabeth D. Kirk*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Palgrave, 2006): pp. 165–86. In its evocation of the goddess Natura, Kynde is potentially another figure who violates expected gender, an issue I discuss further in Chapters 1–2.

and other corporal entities.”⁴⁸ If we consider Mann’s claims in relation to personifications that indicate divine qualities and then merge back into ordinary language or transform into differently bodied personifications, as Truth and Love do, we might even say that Langland’s allegorical practice has the effect of distributing the divine out into the world *through* language. Personifications serve to anchor the meaning of particular words so that their personified forms remain present to the reader’s mind even as the term slides, as Mann describes it, back into ordinary usage. Every instance of “truþe” or “love” in the poem recalls the divine, in part as a result of the traditional association of these concepts with divine power (associations that warrant Langland’s personifications in the first place), but more urgently because God has in fact appeared in the poem under these very guises.

This transference from divine personification to ordinary use applies to *kynde* as well, a word that makes many appearances in the poem beyond those that suggest a personified figure. Like other Langlandian keywords, *kynde* extends through a network of instances in which the term recurs throughout the poem, functioning as a non-personified noun as well as in adjectival and adverbial forms, some of which can seem strikingly at odds with the term’s divine associations, contributing to the multifaceted quality of *kynde* that I have discussed. In some cases, again in keeping with the shiftiness that Mann ascribes to Langland’s allegorical method, *kynde* becomes briefly and ambiguously personified. Capitalization is, of course, an editorial practice, so on these occasions it can be difficult to determine whether a particular instance of *kynde* should be understood as continuous with the figure established by Wit’s description in B.9 or simply as nature more generally.⁴⁹ For example, when the narrator observes the Crucifixion in B.18, *kynde* prevents the “cachepol” from breaking Christ’s legs and arms in order to hasten his death, as he had done to the thieves crucified alongside Christ:

Ac was no boy so boold Goddes body to touche;
For he was knyzt and kynges sone, [k]ynde foryaf þat þrowe
That noon harlot were so hardy to leyen hond vpon hym. (B.18.75–7)

⁴⁸ Mann, “Allegory and *Piers Plowman*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Piers Plowman*, ed. Andrew Cole and Andrew Galloway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 80. See also, Mann, “Langland and Allegory: The Morton W. Bloomfield Lectures on Medieval English Literature, II.” (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992). Reprinted in *The Morton W. Bloomfield Lectures*, ed. Daniel Donoghue, James Simpson, and Nicholas Watson (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2010), pp. 20–41.

⁴⁹ Other occasions in which *kynde* seems on the verge of personification include B.2.27–7a, C.2.27–7a, C.10.247, B.14.111–20, and B.20.253–6a.

Although I generally follow Schmidt's parallel-text edition of the poem, in this instance I have set Schmidt's capitalized "kynde" in lowercase to highlight the way that personifications slide into ordinary language and back again, especially in the case of Kynde, whose designation of God as creator suggests his enduring presence in the world he creates. Hugh White reads this instance of apparent personification as an anomaly on the grounds that "God's creativity does not seem to be in point"; rather, he surmises, the quasi-personification is a reminder of God's jurisdiction over the mundane order, which extends to what is "naturally appropriate in the social and other realms."⁵⁰ But while it is true that here and throughout the poem *kynde* extends the divine into the human sphere, White overlooks the scene's gesture toward the more fundamental intimacy of God and nature, particularly because God's creativity is very much at issue in the larger context of this passage. In the lines just preceding these, Langland embellishes the Gospel accounts of the darkness that accompanied Christ's death. The material world—here briefly personified—seems to respond to or mimic the embodied experience of its creator:

The lord of lif and of light þo leide hise eizen togideres.
 The day for drede wiþdrouȝ and derk bicam þe sonne;
 The wal waggede and cleef, and al þe world quaued. (B.18.59–61)

In this exceedingly rich image, Langland again activates what Schmidt refers to as God's "nature-names": he is "lord of lif and of light," precisely as Wit had described Kynde at B.9.29.⁵¹ Schmidt finds this echo of Kynde's titles to be ironic, presumably because the God without beginning, now incarnate as Christ, cries out an ending—"Consummatum est"—and the creation that he enlivens and enlightens as "lord of lif and of light" grows dark (B.18.57). There is certainly a sublime symmetry to these scenes, paired across nine passūs; but, far from ironic, the moment is consistent with Langland's handling of *kynde*'s relation to divinity throughout the poem in its revelation of the intimate, material, and even linguistic connection between creator and creation. In this regard, the scene is supremely *unironic*: there is nothing unexpected or incongruous about the coordination of Christ's closing eyes and the withdrawal of daylight, for the natural world is nothing but an expression of its creator.

⁵⁰ White, *Nature and Salvation*, p. 87, n. 64. Schmidt similarly comments that *kynde* here makes "primary reference to God, but with a secondary sense of 'the nature of things, what was fitting for someone who had *the kynde of a knyght*,'" referring back to the chivalric language of Christ's entry at the opening of the passus. See Schmidt, "Commentary, Bibliography and Indexical Glossary," in Schmidt, ed., *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C, and Z Versions*, vol. 2, pt. 2, p. 685, note to line 78.

⁵¹ Schmidt, "Commentary," p. 684, notes to lines 56 and 59.

Langland's association of *kynde* and divinity throughout the poem has prepared readers for this moment, and it is then no surprise when several lines later Kynde appears briefly personified as a custodian of "Goddess body" (B.18.75). Indeed, because of this transitivity, we need not capitalize "kynde" in the lines above in order to understand God's presence in the term, and that is exactly the point of Wit's initial identification of God and Kynde. Whenever *kynde* suggests nature in a more general, non-personified way, the prior associations of Kynde with God as "Fader and formour" become reactivated, conditioning our reading of nature in its ordinary sense, indeed, such that the ordinary becomes extraordinary. Every mention of *kynde* in the poem links semantically with every other occurrence of the word, lending a cumulative force to Langland's imaginative association of God, created nature, Christ, humankind, and the ethical and spiritual imperative to *be* kind. In this way, through *kynde* Langland weaves God into the texture of his poem.

TROPING KYNDE: THE SAMARITAN AS POET

To draw together the themes I've considered here and to indicate their broader consequence for the poem at large, I turn to Langland's representation of the Good Samaritan of Luke's gospel in B.17, an example that epitomizes the confluence of divine creativity, poetic making, and ethical action in Langland's terminology of *kynde*. In this episode, the Samaritan reveals himself as a reader of the book of nature when he draws an analogy between the divine mystery of the Trinity and Will's own human hand. His reading of the hand as "an euvidence" of its creator's nature—and of the human obligation to continue the creator's work—demonstrates the positive evaluation of *kynde* that Langland's emphasis on divine creativity makes possible (B.17.196). Moreover, in its representation of the physicality of divine craftsmanship and of God's intimate presence in human life, the Samaritan episode elucidates Langland's representation of God as Kynde. Both figures draw attention to the material world as a product of divine self-expression and, therefore, as a potential site of mediation, a means to know God. As the Samaritan "makes sense" for Will by troping the body, acting as an intermediary between flesh and spirit, so, too, Langland's poetics of *kynde* explores the power of language to name, if not to comprehend, the divine.

Following his encounters with Moses and Abraham, who are personified as Hope and Faith, respectively, Will observes the Samaritan's ministrations to the man robbed and left wounded along the roadside. Astounded by these interventions, Will asks the Samaritan whether he

should believe Moses's admonition to love his enemies or Abraham's declaration of God's triunity: both claims seem beyond belief. In response, the Samaritan urges Will to raise his hand. He proceeds to read the hand first as evidence of its creator's triune nature and, later, following on his initial theme of God's creativity, as a guide to ethical action. The Father, he says, is like a fist, the Son its unfurling fingers, and the Holy Spirit the palm. Although the persons are distinct, like the parts of a hand all three are united in essence and common purpose:

The Fader was first as a fust wiþ o fynger folden,
 Til hym louede and liste to vnlosen his fynger
 And profrede it forþ as with a pawme to what place it sholde.
 The pawme is purely þe hand, and profreþ forþ þe fyngres,
 To ministren and to make þat myzt of hand knoweþ. (B.17.139–43)

Like the Tree of Charity in the preceding passus, the hand's extension in time and space tells the story of God's involvement in human life. The nature of the Trinity in fact demands a dynamic image to illustrate the relationship of its parts, for the analogy is grounded not only in structure but in function, too: through the Trinity, as with a capable hand, God makes things.

Set loose from the fist, the extended finger that represents the Son marks the hand's first motion toward Trinitarian self-expression:

The fyngres þat fre ben to folde and to serue
 Bitoknen sooply þe Sone, þat sent was til erþe,
 That touched and tastede at techynge of þe pawme
 Seinte Marie, a mayde, and mankynde lauȝte:
Qui conceptus est de Spiritu Sancto. (B.17.146–9a)

The Son is the outgoing agent of the triune God, the means by which God interacts with and intimately experiences his creation. In a strikingly tactile account of Mary's conception of Christ, the Son probes his mother's virgin womb. Through physical contact with her flesh, he "lauȝte," or "latched onto," her "kynde," a word that encompasses both the nature and the form of a human being (B.17.149).

But God's embodiment in the Incarnation is only a preface to the Samaritan's ensuing account of divine triunity and its fruits. Following his initial distinction of the parts of the hand, an explanation that maps the opening of the divine fist onto Christ's Incarnation, the Samaritan begins to describe the Trinitarian hand at work at an earlier moment in salvation history, indeed at its very beginning:

And as my fust is ful hand yfolden togideres,
 So is þe Fader a ful God, formour and shappere:

Tu fabricator omnium . . .

And al þe myzt myd hym is in makynge of þynges. (B.17.167–9)

As a fist opens to reveal its full kinetic ability, so too, the Samaritan explains, the Father is a “ful God,” containing two additional persons who “fill out” the Trinity and together enable the divine hand to express its “myzt” in forming and shaping things. Moreover, by framing the Creation with the Incarnation in unexpected historical order, the Samaritan’s narrative suggests that both events are part of one continuous motion of divine unfolding or self-expression. God makes himself manifest in both ways, first when he creates the “erþe,” and then when he inhabits it as man. The analogy never lets us lose sight of God’s primary role as “formour and shappere,” which means that God is present in creation even prior to the historical event of the Incarnation but that he makes the world *through* the action of the Son, the initial sign of the Father’s self-expression.

Lawrence Clopper has described the Samaritan’s analogy as evidence of Langland’s Bonaventuran exemplarism, a sacramental view of nature that “posits a universal analogy between the Persons of the Trinity and every individual and thing in this world.”⁵² Chiefly a theory of divine creativity, exemplarism has implications for human creativity, too. For Clopper, Langland’s exemplarism explains the specific forms the poem takes, from the alliterative long line with its characteristic three accentuated stresses to the allegorical trio of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest. Like the natural world itself, Clopper observes, *Piers Plowman* “is littered with vestiges, images, and similitudes that provide a means back to the Father if they are read aright.”⁵³

Building on Clopper’s insight that exemplarism is both a way of reading and a way of writing, I propose that the Samaritan’s description of his analogy as a “skile” in B and a “simile” in C invites us to read his performance as a metapoetical claim, in fact, as a defense of poetry (B.17.196, C.19.161). As we have seen, the dynamic hand is an image of mediation, the instrument of an outgoing God who crafts, probes, and embraces his creation. Langland presents the Samaritan as a maker, too, although unlike God “þat al bygan in bigynnyng of the worlde,” the Samaritan does not create *ex nihilo* but pieces together observations from God’s book of nature, teaching Will—and the poem’s readers—how to find meaning in the things of creation (C.19.113).⁵⁴ In linking divine and

⁵² Clopper, “*Songes of Rechelesnesse*,” p. 105.

⁵³ Clopper, “*Songes of Rechelesnesse*,” p. 141.

⁵⁴ In this respect, the Samaritan’s role is parallel to that of Imaginatif in B.12, as I discuss in Chapter 3.

human modes of “makynge” by describing the Trinitarian hand at work in Creation, the Samaritan models an imaginative or poetic approach to theology, an associative method that proceeds in B by “skillfully” constructing likenesses—or, in C, by collecting similitudes—to *make sense*, to bridge the gap between the self and world, known and unknown, the quotidian and the ineffable.⁵⁵ Furthermore, set within the context of the Samaritan’s actions in the poem, the analogy suggests that this kind of “sense-making” is an ethical act. Poetry that translates natural phenomena into the terms of God’s truths is a form of charity, an act of neighborly love in keeping with the Samaritan’s canonical ministrations to the man who lies wounded and abandoned in the roadway.

Langland links the two halves of the Samaritan’s performance—his actions and his analogy—in the dramatic gesture that inaugurates the Samaritan’s discourse on the Trinity. While the hand-in-motion provides a dynamic vehicle to distinguish three persons in one God, to describe their relations, and to delineate the attributes or powers appropriated to each, the Samaritan likewise insists on their unity: after the Father’s initial desire (he “louede and liste to vnlosen his fynger,” B.17.140), each part of the hand cooperates in every action the hand undertakes, and each individual part—fist, fingers, palm—is also at once the hand entire:

So is þe Holy Goost God, neiþer gretter ne lasse
 Than is þe Sire or þe Sone, and in þe same myghte,
 And alle are þei but o God, as is myn hand and my fyngres:
 Vnfolden or folden, my fust and my pawme—
 Al is but an hand, howso I turne it. (B.17.180–4)

This final gesture of turning the hand highlights its Trinitarian unity: considered from any angle, its several parts are always understood as an integral whole.

But beyond its local purpose, the verb “turne” offers a clue to the Samaritan’s hermeneutic method and to his larger role in the poem: the Samaritan identifies himself as a maker of tropes. From the Greek root *tropos*, a trope is a “turn,” but can also indicate a mode, tendency, or manner. In ordinary usage, a trope is a figure of speech or literary motif; in the *Poetria Nova*, for example, Geoffrey of Vinsauf defines the ten major tropes as “turns of phrase,” or “transpositions” of meaning (the word he uses is *transsumere*, “to take across”);⁵⁶ but the tropological sense is also

⁵⁵ On Langland’s fictive “sense-making,” see Middleton, “Narration and the Invention of Experience,” discussed above.

⁵⁶ Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria nova*, in *Les Arts poétiques du XIIe et du XIII siècle: recherches et documents sur la technique littéraire du moyen âge*, ed. Edmond Faral, Bibliothèque de l’Ecole des Hautes Etudes 238 (Paris: Champion, 1924), line 770. See the

one of the four levels of Scriptural exegesis, that which uncovers the moral meaning of the text, *turning* words to action. The turning hand draws our attention to the Samaritan's discourse as an example of what Ryan McDermott has recently described as Langland's tropological poetry, the product of "habits of tropological interpretation" that, he writes, "translate into habits of tropological invention."⁵⁷ In McDermott's reading of the poem's relationship to its Scriptural models, the tropological sense designates "all knowledge concerned with practical action"; it is, McDermott writes, a "hermeneutics that requires conversions," specifically, "from ideas to words and words into actions."⁵⁸ With Langland's Samaritan, we see this process in reverse: his ethical action *precedes* his ethical wordplay, but the sequence nevertheless retains the characteristic "turn" of the trope, pointing to the potential commensurability of ethical action and ethical writing and, moreover, suggesting that the Samaritan's exemplary act of love, translated into an ethical text, can inspire future acts of love down the tropological chain. The Samaritan is a tropological maker in McDermott's sense precisely because of the medial position he inhabits: "tropological invention," McDermott writes, is "a pilgrim invention, always underway between doctrine and fulfillment."⁵⁹ The Samaritan is just such a pilgrim, at once with respect to his parabolic context, which puts him "on the road," between places; in his typological relationship to Christ; and, finally, as I have begun to suggest, in his mediatory relationship to the material world, as an exemplary reader of the book of nature.

As he turns the hand (perhaps Will's raised hand), investigating its structure and formal composition, getting a look from every side, the Samaritan teaches by troping the body, bringing it into relation with its divine source. The Samaritan is a capable spokesperson for the value of the human body, never as an end in itself, but as a means to know God. He has been associated with embodiment since his arrival in the passus, in B riding a "capul þat highte *Caro*," meaning "flesh" in Latin (B.17.108). The narrator watches as, following Luke 10: 30–7, the Samaritan alone stops to aid a man who has been robbed and left "*semyvif*," his violated flesh exposed as he lies in the roadway "as naked as a nedle" (B.17.56–7). The Samaritan skillfully cleans and binds the man's wounds, then gathers his broken body into his lap, so that it becomes one with his own as they

translation by Margaret F. Nims, *Poetria Nova of Geoffrey of Vinsauf* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1967).

⁵⁷ Ryan McDermott, "'Beatus qui verba vertit in opera': Langland's Ethical Invention and the Tropological Sense," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 24 (2010): p. 172.

⁵⁸ McDermott, "'Beatus qui verba vertit in opera,'" pp. 188, 203.

⁵⁹ McDermott, "'Beatus qui verba vertit in opera,'" p. 188.

journey forward on *Caro*: “Wiþ wyn and with oille hise woundes he wasshed,/ Enbawmed hym and bond his heed, and in his lappe hym leide” (B.17.70–1). But while the Samaritan renders urgent physical aid and brings the man to the “graunge” called *Lex Christi* where his healing can and must continue (B.17.72), he cannot cure the man, as he himself avows: there is “no medycyne vnder molde” that will heal these wounds except “þe blood of a barn born of a mayde” (B.17.92, 94). In C, he promises, the “lycane,” the *body*, of “þat litel baby” will heal humankind (C.19.94–5). The Samaritan’s actions and his analogy endow the flesh with intrinsic value, but he understands that value in relation to its maker: only God’s body saves, and it is toward that body that the Samaritan intends when the narrator interrupts his ride “Ierusalemward” (B.17.80).

The whole episode expresses movement *toward* God’s body from a starting point in the human body. As he had tended the wounded man when there was “noon help abouten” (B.17.57), so too he offers Will the analogy of the hand as a bridging measure, to bring him away from doubt and confusion to the beginnings of understanding. Both aspects of the Samaritan’s performance serve the same end, that is, charity: his lessons on the faith are continuous with the urgent bodily succor he offers the wounded man. This is not to say that the Samaritan *effects* salvation in either case, though he is a type of Christ; his work instead draws attention to the role of the human mediator, a point underscored when he vanishes in haste having vowed to return with Christ’s salvific blood, the only medicine that will truly heal the “*semyvif*” man (B.17.56). Christ’s body saves, but the Samaritan and his analogy point the way toward salvation.

The Samaritan’s gesture toward the flesh establishes God’s enduring presence in creation and declares the essential dignity of the human body through the association; but more remarkably, in articulating the suitability of material things as vehicles for spiritual things, he also offers a defense of theological poetry. If nature mediates God’s presence—because he is its creator—then nature can serve as a means of reaching back toward God. The Samaritan’s analogy is, I suggest, one distinct example of *Piers Plowman*’s larger wager that poetry can be an ethical act. The Samaritan’s reading of the hand demonstrates that ethics is grounded in nature, which is itself an expression of God. Poetic making is not just an imitation of God’s own art; it is ethical because it translates God’s will in nature.

Although we are in the habit of thinking of the poem’s Trinitarian analogies as theological in the sense that they expound doctrine and explore the nature of God, the significance of the Samaritan’s analogy is not only what it discloses about God—his triune nature, his intimacy in the act of creation and, later, the Incarnation—but also what it says about

human efforts to come to know that creator, to reach back through language, through figures, through the physical world that God created. If we conceive of the Samaritan's entire performance as a trope—in all of its kinetic, literary, hermeneutic, and moral senses—what conclusions, then, can we draw from Langland's description of the analogy as a "skile" in B (B.17.196) and a "simile" in C (C.19.161)? The Middle English word *skile* primarily denotes the faculty of reason or, by extension, a reasoned argument.⁶⁰ It emphasizes the Samaritan's—in fact, *the poet's*—interpretive role in pairing observed likenesses, in selecting a hand as an appropriate vehicle to represent the mystery of God's triune nature and in teasing out, or turning over, its various parallel traits and correspondences. *Simile*, by contrast, a Latin term meaning "likeness" or "similitude," may seem to remove the suggestion of cleverness associated with *skile*, hinting perhaps at a more fundamental or universal connection between the analogy's two terms.⁶¹ Langland's revision from B to C seems designed to emphasize the similitude rather than the human faculty that observes it. That is to say, *simile* suggests a transcendent rather than a contingent likeness, emphasizing the distinction between the systematic exemplarist worldview, which is a theory of nature, and exemplarist rhetorical practices, the arts of preachers and other moralists. As a *simile*, the Samaritan's hand is more than a teacher's heuristic or a poet's conceit: it is a testament to God's real and enduring presence in human life. While *skile* places the emphasis on the Samaritan's invention, *simile* reminds readers that the likenesses he finds are *already there*, part of the order of creation.

The cognate term "similitude" appears across a range of texts in the Middle English corpus—frequently as a synonym for "parable"⁶²—but *simile* appears only in the C-text of *Piers Plowman*, and the Samaritan's use of the word is in fact its second occurrence in the poem. In her study of the poem's metaphors of marriage and family, Tavormina examines Langland's first use of the term *simile*, which also occurs in the context of a Trinitarian analogy, in Abraham's comparison of the three divine persons to the Adamic family. Here the Son is described as "in God . . . in a *simile* as Eue/ Was, when God wolde oute of þe wye ydrawe" (C.18.227–9).⁶³

⁶⁰ MED, s.v. "skil" (n.), especially senses 1 and 5.

⁶¹ MED, s.v. "simile" (n.) lists this instance in *Piers Plowman* C.19.161 as the sole occurrence in Middle English, but in fact Langland also uses it at C.18.227, as I discuss below; compare the more common "similitude" (n.).

⁶² See MED s.v. "similitude," definition 3b. I am indebted to Mary Raschko for bringing this usage to my attention.

⁶³ Tavormina, *Kindly Similitude*, reads Wit's association of marriage with Dowel in B.9/C.10. as the "natural, divinely-established 'production plan' for Dowel's continuing

That is, the Son is in the Father and comes from him *in the same way* that Eve was in and comes from Adam when God drew her from his side. As Tavormina observes, this analogy establishes a “double likeness” whereby “Eve’s similitude to Adam is a similitude of the Son’s similitude to the Father.”⁶⁴ Because it serves to link human beings to their creator, “[s]imilitude,” Tavormina writes, “is the greatest trope of all.”⁶⁵

If, as Tavormina suggests, similitude is the “greatest trope” because it is the basis of salvation, the “way back” to God, the Samaritan’s use of the term reveals that similitude is also the “greatest” because it is the trope *about* troping. That is, similitude (or *likeness*) reveals the nearly kinetic force of analogical thinking to move from one plane of meaning to another. The Samaritan’s exegesis of the hand performs an ontological feat, moving from matter to spirit, in the same way that, as Tavormina suggests, Abraham moves “from *figura* to *res*” as his discussion shifts from the issue of earthly “matrimonie” to the mysterious self-generating relation of the Trinitarian persons: “Now,” Abraham says in his transition, “go we to Godhede” (C.18.227).⁶⁶ Abraham’s words carefully mark the “turn” characteristic of the trope, the movement from vehicle to tenor, from the figurative to the literal ground of meaning, which is paradoxically also a movement from concrete, physical things (the sensible world of nature) to spiritual truths (the intelligible real). Indeed, tropological thinking is the basis of an exemplarist reading of nature precisely because it enables not only movement, but *vertical* movement, as Tavormina writes, an “ascending return” to the source of the similitude.⁶⁷ And yet in considering the Samaritan’s explication of the hand as a “turning point,” a tropological project that points at once back toward its source and forward to its fulfillment, I propose that in *Piers Plowman*, “going to the Godhede” can be performed on a horizontal axis as well, in looking to one’s neighbor, to the evidence of one’s own body, and turning over pages in the sequence of the poem, to the advent of Christ, who is, after all, not only “semblable to þe Samaritan” (B.18.10), but the author of his story. Making “similes,” the Samaritan episode reveals, is an *imitatio Christi*.

presence among human beings, the dynamic process whereby Dowel is constantly regenerated along with the species . . . it is marriage which enables that capacity to be physically and morally transmitted from one generation to the next” (p. 86). Here, as later in the Samaritan’s analogy, the body—via sexuality as regulated through the institution of marriage—links human creatures with their creator.

⁶⁴ Tavormina, *Kindly Similitude*, p. 158.

⁶⁵ Tavormina, *Kindly Similitude*, p. 159.

⁶⁶ Tavormina, *Kindly Similitude*, p. 157.

⁶⁷ Tavormina, *Kindly Similitude*, p. 157.

My reading of this episode as an example of natural capacity differs sharply from David Aers's interpretation of the wounded man as an allegory of the fundamental *disability* of postlapsarian human nature, an incapacity that results from the devastating and ongoing effects of sin. Indeed, Aers dubs the wounded man "Semyuief" after Will's declaration in C that "*semyuief* he semede" (C.19.57). His analysis of the Samaritan episode is part of his larger argument in *Salvation and Sin* against the inadequacy of Ockhamist or semi-Pelagian theology, which, he contends, trivializes sin by claiming that human beings can choose to live righteously and reject sin *ex puris naturalibus*, by the resources of nature alone.⁶⁸ Aers takes critics to task for "forgetting" Semyuief and the distorting effects of sin that, he maintains, the character embodies.

Aers's work—in *Salvation and Sin*, as throughout his career—is an important reminder of the centrality of Christology in Langland's salvation theology. My own assertions of nature's positive spiritual value in *Piers Plowman* share Aers's emphasis on the need for mediation, although I argue that Langland's remarkable figure Kynde suggests that nature is *already* a mediation, that nature (as *kynde*) does work that is analogous to (though not equivalent to) the work of Christ as mediator and at times, as I will show, Langland makes the association between Christ and *kynde* quite explicit. Aers's reading of this episode as an example of the incapacity of human nature relies on the equivalency of Christ and the Samaritan (or as Aers calls him, "Christ the Samaritan").⁶⁹ I've proposed, conversely, that by observing their distinction Langland instead mobilizes the Samaritan as an ideal imitator of Christ and, as such, a testament to natural capacity and a model for an ethical poetics.⁷⁰

KYNDE IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

The following chapters unfold this book's argument in two linked parts, an organization that reflects its claim that Langland's vision of nature moves from epistemology to ethics, from natural knowledge to a life of charity. The first two chapters examine the theory of natural and linguistic capacity that Kynde represents, while the final three chapters demonstrate that theory in practice by examining Langland's vision of human action in

⁶⁸ Aers, *Salvation and Sin: Augustine, Langland, and Fourteenth-Century Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).

⁶⁹ Aers, *Salvation and Sin*, p. 89.

⁷⁰ On the two ways of reading the Samaritan, both attested in medieval commentaries, see Mary Raschko, "Love of God and Neighbour: The Communal Ethics of Langland's Samaritan Parable," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 26 (2012): pp. 49–75.

the world, instances of interpretive and ethical “makynge” that respond to God’s original activity as creator.

Chapter 1, “From Cosmos to Microcosm: Nature, Allegory, Humanism,” reveals how traditional allegories of nature lay the groundwork for Langland’s simultaneously innovative and recuperative model of *kynde* by tracing the downward trajectory Natura takes following her cosmic origin in Bernard Silvestris’s *Cosmographia*. In imagining Natura as a mediator between creator and creation the Latin tradition opens a philosophically productive gap between nature and God. This ontological distance facilitates the study of nature in the twelfth century as the natural world came to be seen as a product of God’s creative power but also as a realm that operates according to regular and observable laws. Scrutiny of nature would not, therefore, infringe upon divine prerogative. But by the fourteenth century, with the full assimilation of Aristotelian science, the gap had widened so far as to signal a demotion for Natura, if not to divide nature from God entirely. This chapter tracks this shift in the major appearances of Natura following Bernard, first in Alan of Lille’s Latin sequels, the *De planctu naturae* and the *Anticlaudianus*, and then in the vernacular contributions of Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la Rose*, Deguileville’s *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine*, and Chaucer’s *Parliament of Fowls*. Natura’s once cosmic influence is steadily circumscribed in these narratives as she becomes increasingly confined to an earthly realm, her powers often implicated in human carnality and moral failure.

Chapter 1 takes a special interest in Chaucer’s treatment of the figure, since his *Parliament* is an exact contemporary to Langland’s poem and offers us a chance to compare ways of thinking about the relationship of nature and divinity at a particular moment in the Middle English allegorical tradition. Chaucer’s goddess Nature represents the value of the natural world in a way that is radically different from that which *Kynde* suggests but also, despite the poet’s assurances, one that is quite distinct from Alan’s vision of nature as well. Although Chaucer’s Ciceronian frame registers what lies beyond Nature’s garden, the *Parliament* celebrates the activities of her limited sphere. Despite the significant distinctions between *Kynde* and Nature, I will argue that Langland’s poetics of *kynde* likewise revalues the terrestrial and the contingent, not by demarcating the observable world from the unknowable transcendent, but by bringing God himself to earth. *Kynde* makes the mundane matter by closing the gap between God and creation that the Natura tradition had opened. Quite the opposite effect from Chaucer’s conscription of Nature in the *Parliament*, *Kynde*’s influence runs not only on a Neoplatonic vertical axis, from God the creator down to human creation, but distributes and extends the reach of nature as well: tethered always to its origin

and referent in the divine, *kynde* nevertheless achieves Aristotelian particularity in its diversity of forms.

Drawing on the traditions of nature's divinity examined in Chapter 1, in Chapter 2, "'Fader and formour': Langland's Creator Kynde," I show how Langland's analysis of the Trinitarian basis of divine creativity recuperates the traditional mediatory and generative functions of the goddess Natura and her sister theophanies. This chapter explores analogues in late-medieval visual and documentary culture as a context for Langland's emphasis on God's creative activity and intimate, even tactile, involvement with his creation, a quality emblemized in the Samaritan's analogy of the hand. Looking to contextual discourses beyond the Natura tradition, other "books of nature," as it were, this chapter suggests that Langland's representation of God's immanence in creation shares a particular affinity with Robert Grosseteste's thirteenth-century poem *Le Château d'amour*, which describes God in scholastic terminology as *natura naturans*, the nature that "natures," or creates. Finally, returning to the Neoplatonic framework of the Chartrian tradition, Chapter 2 argues that Langland presents Christ as "mene" and a principle of divine generativity, demonstrating that even as the poem rewrites the Natura allegory, Langland salvages many of Natura's traditional functions, distributing them among the various persons of the triune God. Through a multidimensionality that recasts the theophanies populating earlier creation allegories, in *Piers Plowman* God's triune constitution provides the instruments of divine experiment and impact in the material world. This chapter reads Kynde as the consequence of Langland's conception of the Christian deity, in the Samaritan's Trinitarian hand analogy, as a "ful God" (B.17.168). Complicating the poem's frequent association of *kynde* and need, a collocation so persuasively documented by Zeeman, my reading draws attention instead to Kynde's representation of God's plenitude, a fullness from which the created world issues and to which human beings have access in creation.

Chapter 3, "'Diuerse siztes': Encyclopedism and Interpretation in *Piers Plowman*," examines a question that arises from Langland's conflation of creator and creation as described in the previous chapter: if God and nature share the name *kynde*, can natural knowledge lead human beings to spiritual truth? This chapter reads the narrator's quest for "kynde knowynge" in the context of contemporary discourses on the value of the natural world as a site for knowledge. I suggest that in his efforts to discover truth through accumulated experiences and observations, a strategy embodied by his wish to "lyue and loke . . . [and] go lerne better" (B.8.58), the poem's narrator represents an encyclopedic impulse, the desire to collect, compile, and anatomize observations of the phenomenal

world. While Langland's characterization of God as Kynde seems to suggest confidence in the created world as a place where human beings might successfully discover divine truths, a point I have argued in relation to the Samaritan's analogy of the hand, in different ways the Vision of Kynde in B.11 and both *Imaginatif's* and *Anima's* ensuing commentaries cast doubt upon the value of the narrator's encyclopedic ambitions and, more generally, the symbolic view of nature as a site for spiritually useful knowledge. Adducing examples from Latin and Middle English encyclopedias, I argue that Langland not only borrows and sometimes reshapes encyclopedic lore, but also actively, and skeptically, engages the mode of thought that produced encyclopedic texts. This chapter suggests that Langland complicates his engagement with the trope of the book of nature by exploring the difficulties of attempting to read it.

The book's final two chapters shift from theological and epistemological questions to more directly ethical concerns. Chapter 4, "Beyond Measure: Langland's Law of *Kynde*," argues that Langland associates *kynde* with the tradition of natural law described by Alan of Lille as the innate desire to love God and neighbor and codified by Gratian's *Decretum* in terms equivalent to the "golden rule" of Matthew 7: 12, which solicits a personal response from judges and law-givers, stipulating that they do unto others as they would have others do unto them. In the speeches of Hunger and Trajan, this chapter argues, Langland envisions the "lawe of kynde," and its related formulation as the "lawe of loue," as an improvisational jurisprudence that resembles the emerging concept of equity. Like the biblical golden rule, Langland's "lawe of kynde" appropriates the structure of justice as reciprocity—a balanced exchange of outcome for action—to turn judgment on its head by bringing the claims of the one to be judged to bear upon the decision of the one who judges.

Developing the previous chapter's concerns with judgment and burden-bearing, in Chapter 5, "'Fullynge' *Kynde*: Nature, Salvation, and Human Action in *Piers Plowman*," I examine the poem's exhortations to convert non-Christians in a crucial passage in which the figure *Anima* challenges all Christians, and especially the Christian clergy, to fulfill the obligations of *kynde* (B.15). *Anima* contends that Christians must distribute not only physical necessities to the materially poor, but also spiritual goods to those who lack knowledge of Christ. *Anima* portrays non-Christians as figures of undeveloped nature, comparing them to rough cloth and the "heath," or barren fields. Accordingly, he enjoins the Christian clergy to teach or "cultivate" non-Christians so that the bareness of their natures might be clothed with grace and brought to salvation. This chapter concludes the project by examining an important episode in which Langland uses the versatile notion of *kynde* to negotiate nature's

gaps and deficiencies: because nature alone does not suffice to salvation, Langland presents his most forceful argument for the necessity of human action—and here especially clerical action—to fulfill the created order established by God. As such, Langland achieves through his poetics of *kynde* a daring vision of human partnership with God.

1

From Cosmos to Microcosm

Nature, Allegory, Humanism

Kynde Conscience þo herde, and cam out of þe planetes . . .
There was 'Harrow!' and 'Help! Here comeþ Kynde,
Wiþ Deep þat is dredful, to vndo vs alle!'

Piers Plowman B.20.80, 88–9

[O]ure present worldes lyves space/ Nis but a maner deth.

Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 54–5¹

I begin with two texts that ask their readers to consider the sublunary world, a place both texts associate with mutability and death, but do not, therefore, devalue. These descriptions point up Chaucer's and Langland's diverse responses to the *Natura* tradition: while Chaucer embraces a goddess whose feet have turned to clay, Langland redivinizes nature on new grounds by joining God to his creation in Kynde. Both authors' representations of the moral value of the natural world gesture back to the humanism of the twelfth-century allegorical tradition that first gave birth to the goddess *Natura*, a figure whose presence lingers over *Piers Plowman* as surely as she is cited by name in Chaucer's poem. While this latter claim awaits fuller demonstration in Chapter 2, here I lay the foundations for reading Langland's treatment of nature alongside Chaucer's as an expression of a continuous though diverse tradition of humanism that locates value in the here and now, in what we might call the life of the microcosm.

In the *Parliament of Fowls*, the lines quoted above summarize the advice of Africanus to his grandson, which the Chaucerian narrator reads in Macrobius's commentary on the *Somnium Scipionis* of Cicero, one of the key texts of twelfth-century Neoplatonic humanism. Here Africanus shows Scipio the world "from a sterry place" so that its significance pales

¹ All citations of Chaucer's works are from Larry D. Benson, gen. ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

against “the hevenes quantite” (43, 58). The lines from *Piers Plowman* likewise juxtapose the sphere of the heavens to the apocalyptic battleground that earth has become in passus 20. Like the *Parliament* as a whole, moreover, these lines describe a trajectory that moves from the frame of the cosmos to the subject of the microcosm, descending with Kynde from “out of þe planetes” (B.20.80) to rest in the sublunary world, what Africanus calls “oure present worldes lyves space” (54). But while we might expect their association of nature and death to precede a disavowal of the worldly realm, both poems, in fact, remain trained on the microcosm even as they signal the universal, eternal context beyond it. Chaucer’s vision ends with a harmonious “roundel” (675) that mimics the music of the spheres, but the poem’s narrator wakes from his dream unsatisfied and resolves to search for answers in other books.² Likewise, as Anne Middleton observes, *Piers Plowman* continues past its “visionary climax” in the Easter passus (B.18/C.20)—where, as in the *Parliament*, quarreling parties reconcile in song—to end “not in world-transcendence, but in [a] return to the world.”³ Both poems locate their inquiry in a world of contingency, of strife and dissatisfaction, but of marvelous variety and sumptuous beauty, too.

This chapter traces the permutations of the goddess Natura and sets out the features of Neoplatonic humanism that offer a rich and unexplored context for the relationship between creator and creation in *Piers Plowman*. Defined variously as a deputy or daughter of God, Natura marks a critical turn in the history of thought about nature, a new worldview that emerged in the schools of twelfth-century France, most notably in the philosophical commentaries produced at Chartres and its milieu.⁴

² The precise form of that song, as presented in lines 680–92 of the *Riverside* edition, is, however, of dubious authenticity. On its status in the poem’s manuscripts, see Ralph Hanna, *Pursuing History: Middle English Manuscripts and Their Texts* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 185–90.

³ Middleton, “The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II,” *Speculum* 53, no. 1 (1978): p. 111. But see Lawrence Warner’s argument in *The Lost History of Piers Plowman: The Earliest Transmission of Langland’s Work* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), pp. 49–61, that the final two passus of C were intruded into B, which would mean that Langland’s ur-B *did* end with the celebratory song of B.18.

⁴ R.W. Southern challenged the notion of a distinctively “Chartrian humanism” in “Humanism and the School of Chartres,” in *Medieval Humanism*, pp. 61–85, and its revised publication in another volume incorporating a response to his critics, “Chartrian Humanism: A Romantic Misconception,” in *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 58–101. Responses to Southern’s assertions have varied in approach but generally maintain the exceptionality of Chartres and its humanistic program. See Peter Dronke, “New Approaches to the School of Chartres,” *Anuario de estudios medievales* 6 (1969): pp. 117–40, reprinted in *Intellectuals and Poets in Medieval Europe* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1992); Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry*, especially pp. 11–73; and Nikolaus Häring, “Paris and Chartres revisited” in *Essays*

In the “renaissance” of the twelfth century, centers of learning flourished with a renewed interest in classical texts, developing a humanistic outlook that sought to better understand the natural world and the condition of human beings within its order.⁵ In this period just prior to the reintroduction of Aristotelian science, humanistic inquiry was founded on a Neoplatonic cosmology derived from Plato’s *Timaeus*.⁶ By depicting creation as a process of divine emanation, the Timaeian cosmology made it possible to conceptualize an integrated universe, an entity “endowed with an ontological coherence of its own.”⁷ Moreover, human beings were not only integral to but modeled on that cosmos: as Plato writes, the Artífex makes human beings from the same materials out of which the greater universe is made and, like the universe, “microcosmic” man is an amalgam of mortal body and eternal soul.⁸ “That the visible universe is a coherent cosmos, informed by soul and modeled on an ideal exemplar, was fundamental,” Winthrop Wetherbee writes, “and to the extent that the world-soul and the archetype were seen as manifestations of God, expressions of his goodness and wisdom, they could render his activity accessible to reason through the visible universe.”⁹ Aristotelianism would largely displace Neoplatonic humanism as the dominant mode of philosophical inquiry in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but Neoplatonic principles remained deeply ingrained in theological and literary traditions even as these, too, were reshaped and enriched by Aristotelianism.¹⁰ The transformations

in Honour of Anton Charles Pegis, ed. J. Reginald O’Donnell (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1974), pp. 268–329. Following Wetherbee in *Platonism and Poetry*, I use the term “Chartrian” more or less as “a matter of convenience” to indicate “a body of ideas and scholars and poets who developed them” (p. xii).

⁵ See Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), pp. 2–27; Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953), pp. 170–218; Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society*; and Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry*, pp. 11–66.

⁶ On the influence of the *Timaeus* in the Chartrian context, see Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry*, especially pp. 28–36. Platonic ideas entered the schools through Chalcidius’ Latin translation of the *Timaeus* and, indirectly, through the writings of pagan authorities like Cicero, Seneca, and Macrobius, as well as Christian fathers from both the Greek and Western traditions, including the Pseudo-Dionysius, Augustine, and Boethius. See Raymond Klibansky, *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition during the Middle Ages* (London: Warburg Institute, 1939), pp. 21–3.

⁷ Tullio Gregory, “The Platonic Inheritance,” in *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, ed. Peter Dronke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 63.

⁸ See *Timaeus* 41A–D, 35–6. All citations of the *Timaeus* refer to Chalcidius’s translation and commentary in J.H. Waszink, ed., *Timaeus a Calcidio translatus commentarioque instructus* (London and Leiden: Warburg Institute and Brill, 1962).

⁹ Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry*, p. 25.

¹⁰ For a particularly sensitive account of the literary reception of Aristotelianism, see Jessica Rosenfeld, *Ethics and Enjoyment in Late Medieval Poetry: Love after Aristotle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). On the diversity of medieval humanism

within the Natura tradition over these crucial centuries indeed record the confrontation of the Neoplatonic and Aristotelian philosophies: in tracking the poets' representations of Natura, we also trace a history of ideas.

In examining the tradition's shifts over time, this chapter takes shape in response to questions that first prompted this study as a whole: What is Kynde's literary history? Should Kynde be considered part of the Natura tradition? Supposing that the Natura allegories are among the "books of nature" that informed Kynde, what features of that tradition did Langland find sufficiently attractive to recuperate in his figure and, conversely, what features finally drove him to break with tradition in renaming, regendering, and, as I will argue in Chapter 2, effectively redeifying Natura as Kynde?

By examining diachronically the literary and intellectual history that the Natura tradition represents, some answers to these questions begin to emerge: in these narratives Natura's once cosmic influence is steadily circumscribed over time as she becomes increasingly confined to an earthly realm, set at odds with figures such as Reason, Theology, and Grace. For some contributors to this tradition, such as Jean de Meun and Chaucer, a non-transcendent view of nature facilitates investigations of the here and now, a humanism inflected by Aristotelianism; others, such as Deguileville, seize on Natura's decline to emphasize the preeminence of the spiritual over the material, advancing something of an antihumanist pastoral agenda. Faced with a diminished Natura and a well-worn tradition, Langland, as I shall argue, takes a different approach: in Kynde, he revives a Neoplatonic vision of the moral value of nature based on its intimacy with God, and through the poem's expansive vocabulary of *kynde* reintegrates the divine and mundane realms of the universal order.

NATURE AND DIVINITY

Because the twelfth-century Natura allegories emerged as the intertextual product of an ambitious arts curriculum and commentary tradition, our study of Natura begins with several classical and late-antique personifications of nature that undergird the more expansive medieval versions of the figure.¹¹ The influx of Aristotelian science challenged, transformed,

along Neoplatonic and Aristotelian lines, see Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry: Alan of Lille's "Anticlaudianus" and John Gower's "Confessio Amantis"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹¹ On the curriculum at Chartres, see Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry*, pp. 19–27.

and displaced Neoplatonic theories of nature in subsequent centuries, but the texts that shaped the earliest manifestations of the *Natura* tradition continued to be studied throughout the Middle Ages and remained available as resources to inform ways of thinking about the value of nature, including those that define themselves as alternatives to the Aristotelian trend.¹² The poets Statius and Claudian represent nature as the origin and keeper of universal order whose influence establishes the bonds that govern human relationships as well as physical processes. Macrobius launches the figure's association with sexuality but also with allegory, and Boethius designates nature as an instrument of divine providence, a cosmic force of love. In these early accounts, nature is decidedly divine; in brief personifications, these poets represent Nature either as a goddess or as an aspect of God.

In Statius' *Thebaid*, *Natura* is called "princeps," a representation of the Stoic vision of divine order.¹³ Though she neither speaks nor appears in the action of the poem, *Natura*'s influence is established by other characters' appeals to her.¹⁴ For example, when the brothers Polynices and Eteocles prepare to fight one another at the urging of the Furies, *Pietas* begs *Natura* to intervene in this violation of fraternal love. As C.S. Lewis observes, "[T]his 'Nature', to whom *Pietas* can appeal over the heads of men and gods, is no other than that One in whose light the Olympians are beginning to look pale. She is the Whole (or God, or Nature, or *Cosmos*) of the Stoics . . . the ancestress of Alanus' *Natura* and Chaucer's *Kinde*."¹⁵ In fact, Statius' *Natura* more accurately predicts *Langland*'s *Kynde* than either Alan's or Chaucer's versions of the goddess, since both of these

¹² In Wetherbee's estimation, the Chartriens' "formative influence on the study of classical texts throughout the later Middle Ages is strikingly plain . . . Most important, they inspired new essays in poetic mythmaking; it is in no small part to their example that we owe the *Roman de la Rose*, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, and the *Divina Commedia* itself." See Wetherbee, "Philosophy, Commentary, and Mythic Narrative in Twelfth-Century France," in *Interpretation and Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period*, ed. Jon Whitman (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 229. On the influence of school-texts on later medieval literature, including *Piers Plowman*, see Mann, "'He Knew Nat Catoun': Medieval School-Texts and Middle English Literature," in *The Text in the Community: Essays on Medieval Works, Manuscripts, Authors and Readers*, ed. Mann and Maura Nolan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2006), pp. 41–74, and Cannon, "Langland's *Ars Grammatica*," pp. 3–25. Tony Hunt discusses the circulation of Claudian's *De raptu Proserpinae* and Statius's *Thebaid* in medieval English school-text manuscripts in *Teaching and Learning Latin in Thirteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991), vol. 1, pp. 68–9.

¹³ Statius, *Thebaid*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. D.R. Shackleton Bailey, Loeb Classical Library 207 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), II.250.

¹⁴ See Economou, *The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature*, pp. 43–5 and Lewis's reading of the *Thebaid* in *Allegory of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), pp. 50–5.

¹⁵ Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, p. 58.

figures are carefully subordinated to God while Kynde better conveys Statius's Stoic conflation of divinity and nature.

In Claudian's *De raptu Proserpinae*, Natura is an advocate of order and fecundity. Proserpina's tapestry depicts "Natura parens," the universal parent who brings chaos to order and, later, when that order is violated, assumes another role for which she becomes famous in later centuries, that of "Natura plangens," or Nature the lamenter.¹⁶ Natura's complaints persuade Jupiter to bring an end to the suffering he devised to rouse humankind from lazy habits acquired during Saturn's reign:

Nunc mihi magnis instat Natura querellis
 humanum relevare genus, durumque tyrannum
 inमितemque vocat regnataque saecula patri
 commemorat parcumque Iovem se divite clamat,
 qui campos horrere situ dumisque repleri
 rura velim, nullis exornem fructibus annum.
 se iam, quae genetrix mortalibus ante fuisset
 in dirae subito mores transisse novercae;
 'quid mentem traxisse polo, quid profuit altum
 erexisse caput, pecudum si more pererrant
 avia, si frangunt communia pabula glandes?
 haecine vita iuvat silvestribus abdita lustris,
 indiscreta feris?' (III.33–45)

[Nature now with ceaseless complaint bids me succour the race of man, calls me cruel and implacable tyrant, calls to mind the centuries of my sire's empery and dubs me miser of her riches, for that I would have the world a wilderness and the land covered with scrub and would beautify the year with no fruits. She complained that she, who was erstwhile the mother of all living things, had suddenly taken upon her the hated guise of a stepmother. "Of what avail that man derived his intelligence from above, that he has held up his head to heaven, if he wander like the beasts through trackless places, if with them he crushes acorns for food? Can such a life as this bring him happiness, hid in the forest glades, indistinguishable from the life of animals?"]

¹⁶ Claudian, *De raptu Proserpinae*, in *Claudian*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Maurice Platnauer, Loeb Classical Library 136 (London: William Heineman, 1922), I.250. All quotations and translation of the *De raptu* are from this edition. Ernst Robert Curtius defines fourteen classical roles or functions of Natura as follows: 1) Natura artifex mundi, 2) Natura parens omnium rerum, 3) Natura domina omnium rerum, 4) Natura plasmatrix terrae et locorum, 5) Natura dotatrix hominum, 6) Natura formatrix hominum, 7) Natura domitrix feritatis et mater pietatis, 8) Natura discretrix veteris tumultus, 9) Natura deo Iovi famulos tradens, 10) Natura plangens, 11) Natura de Phoenicis avis immortalitate laborans, 12) Natura pronuba, 13) Natura Dei serva, and 14) Natura alitrix hominum. See Curtius, "Zur Literaturästhetik des Mittelalters," *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 58 (1938): pp. 182–5.

Here Claudian casts Natura as an outspoken advocate for humankind and an instigator of worldly rejuvenation, both roles that she reprises in Bernard Silvestris's allegory. Moreover, Natura's protests anticipate Piers the Plowman's "kynde" appeal to Hunger in B.6 when, following a similarly Saturnine era of lassitude on the half-acre, fields go unworked and wasters starve. Like Natura, Piers balks at his observation of human suffering, a concern that supersedes his interest in maximizing the harvest.

Macrobius's commentary on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* is the first text to link Natura to human sexuality, sowing the seeds of skepticism toward Natura's moral legitimacy, but his portrait of Natura's multilayered garb also inaugurates an allegorical tradition that reads the physical world and pagan myth in parallel fashion as *fabulae* covering hidden truths. In his commentary, Macrobius describes how "artifex natura" shapes the human embryo after the seed has been "intra formandi hominis monetam locato" [deposited in the mint where man is coined].¹⁷ Natura's role as a coiner of men reappears in Alan of Lille's *De planctu Naturae*, as does Macrobius's description of Natura's ornate dress. Modest Natura, he says, wraps herself in "vario . . . tegmine" [variegated garments], protecting her secrets from those who are unfit to interpret them.¹⁸ Just so, ancient writers "covered" their true meanings in the language of myth and metaphor. By drawing an analogy between the natural world and "narratio fabulosa" [fabulous narratives], Macrobius offered twelfth-century humanists a framework for recuperating truths hidden in classical myths like Plato's *Timaeus*.¹⁹ In his commentaries on Macrobius and the *Timaeus*, William of Conches uses Macrobius's notion of nature's "tegmen," or outer wrapping, to develop an influential theory of "integumental" reading that assisted twelfth-century humanists' efforts to reconcile ancient thought with Christian theology.²⁰ But in its reflexivity, Macrobius's analogy establishes

¹⁷ Macrobius, *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, ed. Jacob Willis (Leipzig: Teubner, 1970), I.6.63. All subsequent citations refer to this edition. English translations are from *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. William Harris Stahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952).

¹⁸ Macrobius, *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, I.2.9.

¹⁹ *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, I.2.17, 9. On twelfth-century theories of *fabula* see Stock, *Myth and Science*, pp. 31–62 and Peter Dronke, *Fabula: Explorations into the Uses of Myth in Medieval Platonism* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), pp. 13–67. Dronke summarizes Macrobius's rejected fables, including the famous instance of Saturn's castration of his father, and William of Conches's recuperation of them, pp. 25–30.

²⁰ Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry*, summarizes the practice: "The assimilation of secular writings to Christian contexts, as in the equation of Plato's personifications and mythical figures with the persons of the Trinity, was justified by the conviction that Plato and other ancient philosophers and poets had expressed their deepest wisdom mysteriously, shrouding it in veils of imaginative detail which might consist of mere invented personifications and cryptic etymologies, or involve the use of an extended myth or *fabula*" (p. 37).

a hermeneutics of nature, too. As Jon Whitman writes, “By correlating the trappings of literary works with the trappings of the natural world, Macrobius provocatively associates the nature of textuality with the texture of nature itself.”²¹ In other words, if texts are like nature—multilayered, they hide their meanings beneath surfaces—then nature is like a text, a premise that underwrites the trope of the book of nature and other forms of exemplarism. Moreover, insofar as integumental theory could be used to interpret ancient myths, it also became the basis for writing new ones.²² By taking nature as the subject of their *new* myths, Bernard and Alan bring Macrobius’s image full circle, as we shall see, deploying textual metaphors to describe the creation of the universe and the perpetuation of its order.

For Boethius, nature is a sign of God’s love. In the *De consolazione Philosophiae*, Philosophy celebrates Natura as an instrument of divine providence, a cosmic force that effects the unfolding of God’s will in time. Ultimately, like the Stoic vision of nature in Statius’s *Thebaid*, Boethius suggests that nature is in fact an aspect of God himself, a principle of cosmic order that unifies and maintains creation with a bond of love. In book III, meter 2, for example, Philosophy sings a song of praise for Natura that aligns her work with divine functions:

Quantas rerum flectat habenas
natura potens, quibus immensum
legibus orbem provida seruet
stringatque ligans inresoluto
singula nexu, placet arguto
fidibus lentis promere cantu. (III.m.2.1–6)²³

[“It liketh me to schewe by subtil soong, with slake and delytable sown of strenges, how that Nature, myghty, enclyneth and flytteth the governmentz of thynges, and by whiche lawes sche, purveiable, kepith the grete world; and how she, byndynge, restreyneth alle thynges by a boond that may nat be unbownde.”]²⁴

²¹ Whitman, “Twelfth-Century Allegory: Philosophy and Imagination,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 105.

²² Whitman distinguishes the two approaches as “interpretation allegory” and “composition allegory,” the latter of which appeared sporadically in the classical period, but did not develop into a fully fledged narrative form until Prudentius’s *Psychomachia* at the end of the fourth century. See Whitman’s description of these two traditions in *Allegory*, especially pp. 3–6 and pp. 263–8.

²³ All quotations of Boethius, *De consolazione Philosophiae*, are from CCSL 94, ed. Ludwig Bieler (Turnhout: Brepols, 1984).

²⁴ I cite Chaucer’s Middle English prose translations since they offer an interpretation and “Englishing” of Boethius contemporary with Langland’s investigation of similar concerns. See Chaucer, *Boece*, book 3, meter 2, lines 1–7.

Nature's laws maintain cosmic order and hold its numerous parts together in an integral and enduring whole. But it is apparent that Natura does not work alone in her capacity as governor, since, previously, in book II, meter 8, Philosophy had similarly named Love as the supreme ruler who binds all things in harmony:

Hic sancto populos quoque
iunctos foedere continet,
hic et coniugii sacrum
castis nectit amoribus,
hic fidis etiam sua
dictat iura sodalibus.
O felix hominum genus,
si uestros animos amor
quo caelum regitur regat! (II.m.8.22–30)

[“This love halt togidres peples joined with an holy boond, and knytteth sacrament of mariages in chaste loves; and love enditeth lawes to trewe felawes. O weleful were mankynde, yif thilke love that governeth hevene governede yowr corages.”]²⁵

Boethius establishes an alliance between Nature and Love that suggests their interchangeability: both create and maintain the bonds that hold together the physical structure of the universe and the relationships between its creatures. Moreover, the forces of Nature and Love are linked directly to the one God in Boethius's scheme. In the *De consolacione*, God is an active creator, taking special care over the shaping of the human body, much as Kynde does in *Piers Plowman*. In book III, meter 6, Philosophy explains:

Omne hominum genus in terris simili surgit ab ortu.
Vnus enim rerum pater est, unus cuncta ministrat.
Ille dedit Phoebo radios, dedit et cornua lunae,
ille homines etiam terris dedit ut sidera caelo;
hic clausit membris animos celsa sede petitos:
mortales igitur cunctos edit nobile germen. (III.m.6.1–6)

[“Alle the lynage of men that ben in erthe ben of semblable byrthe. On alone is fadir of thynges; on alone mynystreth alle thynges. He yaf to the sonne his bemes, he yaf to the moone hir hornes, he yaf the men to the erthe, he yaf the steres to the hevene. He encloseth with membres the soules that comen from his heyre sete. Thanne comen alle mortel folk of noble seed.”]²⁶

²⁵ Chaucer, *Boece*, book 2, meter 8, lines 21–7.

²⁶ Chaucer, *Boece*, book 3, meter 6, lines 1–9.

Boethius's emphasis on the "unus" who gives form and life to all things celebrates God's creative potency and establishes the divine lineage of humankind. In meter 9 of the same book, Philosophy further emphasizes God's singular sovereignty as creator:

O qui perpetua mundum ratione gubernas,
 terrarum caelique sator, qui tempus ab aevo
 ire iubes stabilisque manens das cuncta moueri,
 quem non externae pepulerunt fingere causae
 materiae fluitantis opus uerum insita summi
 forma boni liuore carens, tu cuncta superno
 ducis ab exemplo, pulchrum pulcherrimus ipse
 mundum mente gerens similique in imagine formans
 perfectasque iubens perfectum absoluere partes. (III.m.9.1–9)

["O thou Fadir, soowere and creatour of hevene and of erthes, that governest this world by perdurable resoun, that comaundest the tymes to gon from syn that age hadde bygyynnynge; thou that duellest thiselwe ay stedefast and stable, and yevest alle othere thynges to ben meved, ne foreyn causes necesseden the nevere to compounne werk of floterynge matere, but oonly the forme of sovereyn good iset within the withoute envye, that moevede the freely. Thou, that art althirfayrest, berynge the faire world in thy thought, formedest this world to lyknesse semblable of that faire world in thy thought. Thou drawest alle thyng of thy sovereyn ensaampler and comaundest that this world, parfyte ymakid, have freely and absolut his parfyte parties."] ²⁷

Having described the absolute authority of God and his active engagement in the events of creation, Philosophy then identifies God's activity with that already ascribed to Natura and Love, thus uniting the trio: "Tu numeris elementa ligas, ut frigora flammis,/ arida conueniant liquidis, ne purior ignis/ euolet aut mersas deducant pondera terras" (III.m.9.10–12) ["Thou byndest the elementis by nombres proporcionables, that the coolde thinges mowen accorde with the hote thinges, and the drye thinges with the moyste; that the fuyer, that is purest, ne fle nat over-heye, ne that the hevynesse ne drawe nat adoun over-lowe the erthes that ben ploungid in the watis"]. ²⁸ All three figures—Natura, Love, God—are binding forces whose activity governs and maintains the universe. Though it is God alone whom Boethius credits with the initial acts of creation, subsequently the three figures become nearly interchangeable, with Natura and Love as manifestations of the one God.

Boethius's linking of God, Natura, and Love affirms the fundamental value of nature in a manner that anticipates Langland's handling of divine

²⁷ Chaucer, *Boece*, book 3, meter 9, lines 1–17.

²⁸ Chaucer, *Boece*, book 3, meter 9, lines 18–24.

names in *Piers Plowman* where God is called Kynde and Love as well as Truth. Moreover, the Boethian vision of a unified cosmos, fastened together by a bond of divine love, resonates in Langland's flexible deployment of *kynde*, a term that likewise binds the high and the low, the made and unmade, prompting love of God and neighbor through the instinctive moral feeling Langland calls the "lawe of kynde."²⁹

WRITING THE COSMOS: BERNARD SILVESTRIS'S *COSMOGRAPHIA*

Natura takes a starring role in Bernard Silvestris's *Cosmographia*, and through her focalization, the epic sweep of Bernard's humanist vision of creation moves from the cosmos to the microcosm, so that its conclusion sets human beings at center stage. Written in the prosimetrum form, Bernard's *Cosmographia* is divided into two books, the *Megacosmus*, which details the creation of the universe, and the *Microcosmus*, which details the creation of man on the model of the greater cosmos. Although more fully imagined than any before it, Bernard's Natura is by no means the powerful deity that Statius's and Boethius's depiction of nature as a cosmic force predicts, nor even the more autonomous figure she becomes in the later tradition.³⁰ In the *Cosmographia*, Natura and God are linked, and yet crucially separated, by a series of divine emanations, a cosmological model that Bernard adapts from his chief source, Plato's *Timaeus*.

Bernard's Natura is an advocate and an intermediary: she breaks the primordial silence with a complaint on behalf of Silva, or Hyle, the churning mass of formless matter who is Natura's own "vultus antiquissimus" [most ancient manifestation] (I.ii.4: 1).³¹ In response to Natura's complaint, Noys, a theophany of the divine mind, endows Silva with form, and then creates the World Soul, called Endeuchia, and weds it to matter.³² Under Noys's

²⁹ I discuss the "lawe of kynde" and the related "lawe of loue" in Chapter 4. Emily Steiner explores Langland's engagement with Boethian *metra* in *Reading Piers Plowman*, pp. 30–8, and for a discussion of the influence of Boethius on the narrator's initial encounter with Holy Church, see Galloway, *The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman*, vol. 1, pp. 157–61.

³⁰ On the originality of Bernard's invention, see Dronke, "Bernard Silvestris, Natura, and Personification," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 43 (1980): pp. 16–31. For a full consideration of pre-Chartrian personifications, see Economou, *Goddess Natura*, pp. 1–52, and White, *Nature, Sex, Goodness*, pp. 8–47.

³¹ Quotations of the *Cosmographia* are from the edition by Dronke and translations, with some alterations, are those of Wetherbee.

³² On the derivation of the term Endeuchia, see Wetherbee's "Introduction" to *Cosmographia*, pp. 39–42.

supervision, the rest of creation emanates from this union: "Itaque viventis Anime beneficio confortata, de nutricis Silve gremio se rerum series explicavit" [And now, made strong by the vivifying gift of soul, the totality of created life unfolded in ordered progression from the nurturing womb of Silva] (I.2.16: 12–13). When she has finished bringing the world to order, Noys invites Natura to survey her work: "Celum velim videas multiformi imaginum varietate descriptum, quod quasi librum, porrectis in planum paginis, eruditioribus oculis explicauī, secretis futura litteris continentem" [I would have you survey the heavens, inscribed with their manifold array of symbols, which I have set forth for learned eyes, like a book with its pages spread open, containing things to come in secret characters] (II.1.3: 1–4). An open book composed in an enigmatic language, the universe has become an *integumentum*, draped not in clothes, but in verbal signs. Moreover, as if to fulfill Noys's description of nature "quasi librum" [like a book], the *Megacosmus* concludes with an encyclopedic catalogue of the work that Noys and her ministers unfold: the stars and the planets, the beasts of the earth, the mountains and various waters, the trees, plants, and herbs, the fish and the birds.

But creation is not yet complete. Bernard's second book, *Microcosmus*, corresponds to the sixth day of creation in Genesis, the day on which God creates humankind. Noys announces her intention to create man as the pinnacle and fulfillment of her work. Natura again plays an intermediary role: Noys sends her on a quest through the universe in search of Urania and Physis, who will produce man's soul and body, respectively. Natura will unite the two parts, taking as her model the double composition of the universe itself. Both in the stuff of his physical composition as well as the dual nature of his existence, man emulates the greater universe and thus figures an "alter mundus" [second universe], a microcosm, part mundane and part divine (II.12: 13). In the *Cosmographia*, man's double nature is an asset that enables him to master both realms. Among all earth-dwelling creatures, Noys proclaims, man is exceptional. Like the higher powers of the heavens, he alone possesses the faculty of reason:

Ut divina colat, pariter terrena capessat,
 Et gemine causam sedulitatis agat,
 Cum superis commune bonum rationis habebit:
 Distrahet a superis linea parva hominem.
 Bruta patenter habent tardos animalia sensus,
 Cernua deiectis vultibus ora ferunt.
 Sed, maiestatem mentis testante figura,
 Tolle homo sanctum solus ad astra capud,
 Ut celi leges indeflexosque meatus
 Exemplar vite possit habere sue . . .

Viderit in lucem mersas caligine causas,
Ut Natura nichil occuluisse queat. (II.10: 23–32, 35–6)

[That he may at once cherish things divine and have charge of earthly life, and satisfy the demands of a nature which is drawn to both, he will possess the gift of reason in common with higher powers: and indeed only a thin line will separate him from these powers. Brute beasts plainly reveal the grossness of their faculties, their heads cast down, their gaze fixed on the earth; but man alone, his stature bearing witness to the majesty of his mind, will lift up his noble head toward the stars, that he may employ the laws of the spheres and their unalterable courses as a pattern for his own course of life . . . He shall behold clearly principles shrouded in darkness, so that Nature may keep nothing undisclosed.]

Bernard's representation of the Platonic idea of man as a microcosm of the universe develops one of the most important aspects of the new thinking about nature in the twelfth century, a vision of fundamental kinship between human beings and the cosmos. In the *Timaeus*, Plato's Artífex produces the soul of man out of the same elements with which he formed the universe:

[D]emum reliquias prioris concretionis, ex qua mundi animam commiscuerat, in eiusdem crateris sinum refundens eodem propemodum genere atque eadem ratione miscebat, nec tamen eadem exoriebatur puritas serenitasque prouentuum nec tam immutabilis perseuerantiae sed secundae ac tertiae dignitatis.³³

[Now pouring back the remnants of the previous substance, from which he had mixed together the world soul, into the hollow of the same bowl, he mixed together with the same proportion to produce in a very similar manner, though it was not however coming forth with the same pure and clear result, nor one of such an immutable steadfastness, but of a second and third value.]

Plato's Artífex assigns the creation of lower natures to the subordinate deities, in order that some aspects of creation will be made mortal, including the body of man, since a bipartite nature is necessary if the sensible universe is to be an exact copy of the intelligible one. So the Artífex produces soul—both that which animates the cosmos and that which enlivens man—and ensures the potential for man's ultimate immortality while the lesser gods then follow the Artífex in combining these two principles, divine and mundane, to create living man. The *Timaeus* thus presents a model for Bernard's microcosmic man, his body formed out of the same elements that compose the universe and, also in imitation of the greater cosmos, endowed with a life-giving soul joined to the body in a skillful reconciliation of opposites.

³³ *Timaeus* 41D, 36: 14–18.

The vision of man as a reflection of the universe, which Bernard inherits from the *Timaeus*, presents an optimistic view of man's capacities and encourages the pursuit of natural inquiry, since man is both rational and intimately connected to the greater creation surrounding him. As M.D. Chenu writes, imagined as a microcosm, "man is a being consecrated to the world and . . . in coming to know the world he comes to know himself as well."³⁴ As in the lines cited above, where Noys describes the mixed nature of man, the human mind is endowed with intellectual faculties that allow man to master and administer ("curabit") the universe, an entity upon which his own existence is modeled and to which he is bound as a part within a whole. Comprehension of the universe is fully possible for rational man and, more than this, in learning about the composition and behavior of the physical world around him, man also delves into the facts of his own existence, the crucial pursuit of self-knowledge.

These themes will have special relevance for my discussion of "kynde knowynge" in Chapter 3. Like Langland, Bernard represents the knowledge of self, nature, and God as inextricably linked goals. The key, for Bernard, as for Langland, is to unlock the knowledge that *already* resides within the human soul. Natura's journey up through the firmament and back again with Urania as her guide and tutor is an allegory of education: these cosmic wanderings represent human investigations of the natural world, and of the human condition within it, but also function to render such "outward" investigations superfluous. Owing to Natura's efforts, all the knowledge that any human being finally needs is already contained within the soul, as Urania, the soul's educator, proclaims:

Mens humana michi tractus ducenda per omnes
 Ethereos, ut sit prudentior:
 Parcarum leges et ineluctabile fatum
 Fortuneque vices variabilis,
 Que sit in arbitrio res libera, <quid ve ne> cesse,
 Quid cadat ambiguus <sub casibus>
 More recordantis quam <multa reducet> eorum
 Que cernet, penitus <non immemo>r. (II.4: 31–8)

[The human soul must be guided by me through all the realms of heaven that it may have knowledge: of the laws of the fates, and inexorable destiny, and the shiftings of unstable fortune; what occurrences are wholly open to the determination of will, what is subject to necessity, and what is subject to uncertain accident; how, by the power of memory, she may recall many of these things which she sees, being not wholly without recollection.]

³⁴ Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society*, p. 33.

This formulation echoes the Platonic theory of knowledge as recollection, the idea that preexistent souls learn about eternal truths before they are locked into bodies. Even as the exiled soul dwells in the body, it is able to remember these truths.³⁵ Urania, the representation of wisdom, takes measures to prepare the soul for its embodiment although she is at first reluctant to leave her place in the heavens, complaining that “[h]umida colluvies, humili contermina terre,/ Leserit e facili nostrum iubar” [the dank impurity which adheres to the base earth will soon mar my brilliance] (II.4: 23–4). Calling to mind the weeping souls that Natura had encountered on her ascent to Urania’s dwelling place, this goddess of wisdom cannot help but lament the fate of the divine soul, which, upon its embodiment, will be consigned for a term “cecas habitare tenebras” [to dwell in shadowy blindness] (II.4: 9). However, Urania perceives that God wills the composition of man to be an amiable marriage between body and soul, and so, prepared by her education, the soul “regina suum vas incolet” [shall dwell as a queen within her earthly vessel] and, upon the death of the body, return to the stars (II.4: 40, 49–50).

The education of Natura indicates the essential goodness of the natural world and natural impulses, including the thirst for knowledge and self-improvement. Peter Dronke explains why Noys sends Natura off searching for Urania when Noys, as the mind of God, might have simply told Natura where to find Urania: “Natura’s seeking is essential: the natural urge for the perfecting must stem from the natural—just as previously it was Silva herself who longed for beauty, and it was this longing that set a new world-cycle in motion.”³⁶ At the beginning of their journey together, Urania expresses this confidence in nature, and in natural curiosity, with this command to her neophyte sister: “I, Natura—sequar, nec enim vagus incidet error,/ Si directa tuis via ductibus” [Go then, Nature, I follow; for no error can befall, if the way is determined by your guidance] (II.4: 53–4). In Bernard’s universe, nature inclines toward the good, just as matter inclines toward form, both principles subject to the maker’s design. But Urania’s confidence in Natura’s reliability as an intuitive moral guide will face challenges in subsequent contributions to the tradition.

Like the *Timaëus*, the *Cosmographia* concludes with a discussion of the physical attributes of the human body and the faculties of man’s mind, including the senses. Beginning with the head, where wisdom of the soul makes its seat and contains the threefold power of memory, speculation,

³⁵ On the theme of the imprisoned soul and its memory, see Macrobius, *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, I.12.

³⁶ *Cosmographia*, ed. Dronke, p. 40.

and reason, Bernard describes the ordered result of Natura's skillful combination of body and soul, which is arranged hierarchically, with the heart as "[n]ature columen, rex et dictator et auctor" [the mainstay of our nature, king, governor, creator] (II.14: 115). By contrast, the mundane, though necessary, task of material propagation resides in the lowest regions of the body, which houses the two "genii," the "gemini fratres," who labor to perpetuate the human "genus" (II. 14.157–62). In these final lines, the composition of the microcosm finally and necessarily deviates from its macrocosmic model: as Bernard explains, Physis had to give man certain "membra" unnecessary to the universe, which is a perpetual work of creation:

Influit ipsa sibi mundi natura, superstes,
 Permanet et fluxu pascitur usque suo . . .
 Longe disparibus causis mutandus in horas,
 Effluit occiduo corpore totus homo.
 Sic sibi deficiens, peregrinis indiget escis,
 Sudat in hoc vitam denichilatque dies. (II.14: 171–2, 175–8)

[The nature of the universe outlives itself, for it flows back into itself, and so survives and is nourished by its very flowing away . . . But man, ever liable to affliction by forces far less harmonious, passes wholly out of existence with the failure of his body. Unable to sustain himself, and wanting nourishment from without, he exhausts his life, and a day reduces him to nothing.]

While the universal whole thrives, nourished by cycles of death and rebirth, each human life is an individual microcosm; as such, each is "deficiens," lacking the power to sustain its distinct material existence. Physis therefore endows the body with the means to perpetuate its kind, though she cannot grant individual permanence. Natura's involvement in the task of human reproduction—she "[f]ormat et effingit . . . liquorem" [molds and shapes the fluid], the "albetis spermatis instar" [the image of shining sperm]—becomes the immediate literary basis for her later association with sexuality and reproduction in works such as Alan's *De planctu*, Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*, and Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*. But unlike many authors in the later tradition, Bernard presents Natura's involvement with sexuality without moral commentary, and though the second book seems to end on a pessimistic note by describing the transience of human life in contrast to the perpetual work of the universe, these lines are not Bernard's final word on the matter of matter. As throughout the *Cosmographia*, Bernard's conclusion looks to the value of sublunary life, the material world that is home to microcosmic man, however temporary that dwelling may be. Following his allusive description of the human procreative organs, Bernard lists four further physical attributes with which

Physis equips man's body against its decline: "[e]xcubias capitis oculos, modulaminis aures,/ Ductoresque pedes omnificasque manus" [eyes to keep watch in the head, ears for sound, feet to bear him, and all-capable hands] (II.14.181–2). These maker's hands, the last word of the poem, evoke Natura's opening plea to Noys that she give form to shapeless Silva: "Adde manum" [Apply your hand], Natura begs (I.1: 60). Although the material world is characterized by its transience and vulnerability to deformation, *human* hands now join in Noys's cosmic work. As Brian Stock observes, "In the *Cosmographia*, reform is not only brought about by the physical ordering of the elements in the world and in man. It also involves man's cultural achievements, especially the conquest of the secrets of the natural universe."³⁷ Man, with capable hands, becomes himself a partner in the ongoing creative project that Natura began in crying out for form.

The figure of Noys is as close as the *Cosmographia* comes to representing God himself, for, as Urania explains to Natura, "[n]eque . . . credibile deiectionibus elementis, terre sordide, aeri turbulento, sancta et incommutabilis divinitas suarum affixerit sedium mansionem" [it is unthinkable that the sacred and unchanging godhead should establish its dwelling place upon the lowly elements, the impure earth, and the brawling atmosphere] (II.7.3: 1–3). However, Urania moderates her disparagement of the sublunary sphere by explaining that God watches over all of creation "de loco celsitudinis" [from a seat on the celestial heights] and, though he remains hidden in his majesty, he nevertheless "de suorum vestigiis operum perspicuis innotescit" [shines manifest in the visible evidences of his handiwork] (II.7.3: 4, 6). The sensible universe is not, then, as in a strictly Platonic view, a false shadow of the intelligible one; instead, because God makes himself manifest in this world, Bernard insists that the sensible world holds spiritual value in its own right. While the majesty, or essence, of God remains absolutely hidden, his presence suffuses the lower creation through the work of his ministers, emanations that flow from the divine substance, so that the divine is made manifest in the visible things of creation. Bernard's vision of the unified hierarchy that emanates from God establishes in Latin allegory a Neoplatonic model that, I argue in Chapter 2, Langland recasts as persons of the Trinity, linking God, represented as Kynde, ever closer to his creation and the experience of the human body both in its thriving and its passing away.

³⁷ Stock, *Myth and Science*, p. 235.

NATURE AND MORALITY: ALAN'S TWO ALLEGORIES

The celebration of nature in Bernard's *Cosmographia* will be subject to skeptical reassessments in later centuries. Bernard's near contemporary Alan of Lille remains committed to nature's positive moral value even as his allegories probe the limits of natural capacity. Alan wrote two allegories featuring the goddess Natura, the *De planctu Naturae*, and its sequel, the *Anticlaudianus*. Both works take up where Bernard's *Cosmographia* leaves off, focusing on the experience of humankind *after* creation. As in Alan's theological works, in his allegories nature is the basis of an ethical system, an innate knowledge of the good that he equates with the tradition of natural law. Yet alongside his apparent esteem for nature as a guide to moral and ethical behavior, Alan probes a contradiction that haunts his and other authors' association of nature and divinity. In the *De planctu* and the *Anticlaudianus*, his representation of the goddess Natura develops Bernard's investigation of the linked concerns of mutability, sexuality, and death. With Alan's contribution, I argue, we come to a fork in the tradition: one way forward leads to Jean's *Roman de la Rose* and Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, another to Langland's *Kynde*. Before concluding this chapter with Jean's and Chaucer's versions of the goddess, I examine Alan's two allegories in sequence to suggest some of the ways in which they exemplify the confidence in nature that characterized twelfth-century humanism while continuing to nudge Natura along a downward trajectory that increasingly limits the scope and benignity of her influence.

At the outset, the *De planctu* vastly expands Natura's cosmic standing. Alan gives a thorough description of Natura's physical appearance that evokes Boethius's Lady Philosophy, and in a substantial reshuffling of creative duties, he omits the intermediary Noys. This change effectively promotes Natura from her subordinate position in Bernard's hierarchy. In the *De planctu*, God himself, rather than Noys, initially shapes the universe, though the event itself is not depicted since Alan's narrative takes place after the creation of the universe. Here Natura is God's *vicaria*, a deputy responsible for maintaining the order of the initial creation by carefully reproducing like things from like, thus also bringing under Natura's purview the role of Inarmene in Bernard's *Cosmographia*.

But Alan's Natura is not limited to making bodies. Absorbing the roles of Noys and Urania, she also equips human minds for rational inquiry and moral living. She endows humankind with the gift of reason and establishes laws that enable human life to thrive, a description that echoes

Alan's theological writings on natural law, which he defines as an innate desire to love God and neighbor, as in the *Theologicae regulae*: "[S]icut aptus est natus ad ratiocinandum, vel ad intelligendum; ita aptus natus ad reddendum unicuique quod suum est, ad diligendum Deum, et proximum" [Just as [man] is born fitted to reasoning and to understanding, so he is born fitted for rendering to each person what is theirs, for loving God and neighbor].³⁸ Elsewhere Alan similarly affirms the connection between the law of nature, the love of God and neighbor, and the golden rule of Matthew 7: 12.³⁹ In his *Distinctiones*, Alan writes that nature directs a man not to do to others what he would not wish done to himself, and in the *Summa de arte*, he urges, "Consule naturam, illa te docebit diligere proximum tuum sicut te ipsum" [Consult nature; she will teach you to love your neighbor as yourself].⁴⁰ Alan's confidence in nature's moral teaching echoes Urania's dictum at the outset of the celestial journey in the *Cosmographia*: "I, Natura—sequar, nec enim vagus incidet error,/ Si directa tuis via ductibus" [Go then, Nature, I follow; for no error can befall, if the way is determined by your guidance] (II.4: 53–4). As we shall see, Alan's poetry complicates the value of "following nature" by dwelling on Natura's *failure* to rule humankind (or, from another perspective, the human refusal to *be ruled* by nature's laws); but, nevertheless, an underlying conviction about the instinctiveness of moral and ethical knowledge runs like a thread through all of Alan's works. In this respect, the *De planctu* and the *Anticlaudianus* provide a model for Langland's conflicted representation of the natural basis of moral and ethical life in *kynde*. That is to say, Alan demonstrates that it is possible to hold both views simultaneously: nature is an indispensable and universally accessible guide to virtue, and nature is not enough.

Despite the promise of its title, the *De planctu Naturae* begins with a man's rather than a goddess's complaint. The narrator-poet laments the corruption of his age and his contemporaries' disregard for Natura's laws ("decreta"), particularly focusing on the practice of sodomy and other sexual acts regarded as non-normative (1: 3).⁴¹ Summoned by the poet's

³⁸ Alan of Lille, *Theologicae regulae*, 88. PL 210: 667A.

³⁹ On the association of Christ's command in Matthew 7: 12 with the love of God and neighbor, see Jeffrey Wattles, *The Golden Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 56. I discuss Langland's engagement with the golden rule in Chapter 4.

⁴⁰ As one of his definitions of nature, Alan writes: "[N]atura dictat homini ut non faciat aliis quod sibi non vult fieri" [Nature commands man that he should not do to others that which he would not wish to be done to him]. See Alan of Lille, *Distinctiones*, PL 210: 871, and *Summa de arte praedicatoria*, 21, PL 210: 154A.

⁴¹ All quotations of the *De planctu* refer to the edition by Nikolaus M. Häring, *Studi medievali* 19 (1978): pp. 797–879 and translations, with some alterations, are from *The*

outpouring of grief, Natura appears as a beautiful woman, majestically attired. Alan's description of Natura's garb is the first extended depiction of her physical appearance in the tradition, surpassing Bernard's innovative personification by fully embodying the goddess. Perhaps following Macrobius's suggestion,⁴² Alan wraps Natura in layer upon layer of symbolic garments, devoting the whole of the first prose and second meter, over 300 lines in total, to a description of Natura's appearance.⁴³ The encyclopedic description is a celebration of creation: Natura's carefully proportioned body together with the various adornments that cover her collectively signify the entirety of the created universe, from the diadem upon her head, symbolizing with its many and multicolored stones the constellations and planets of the firmament, to her dress and tunic, each richly embroidered with a catalogue of every kind of living thing, from the birds and fish to the earth-dwelling beasts, including humankind. In the *Cosmographia*, a similarly expansive catalogue of creation evokes the trope of the book of nature—the idea that nature is a text that can be read; here, Alan does Bernard one better by weaving that catalogue into the texture of Natura's symbolic dress, thus drawing together the dual senses of textuality implied by Macrobius's *integumental* theory.

Alan deploys the metaphor of textuality to diverse purposes, to suggest both the bounty of the natural order and its vulnerability. On the one hand, he evokes the book of nature to emphasize the copy's resemblance to the divine exemplar and, like Bernard, to convey a sense of nature's encyclopedic structure, a wondrous yet ordered diversity. On the other hand, Alan deploys textual metaphors to suggest the possibility of error, a poor copy, and the introduction of disorder and illegibility. In the narrator's opening complaint, for example, Alan represents non-normative—because non-procreative—sexual practices as perversions of language, elaborating a series of grammatical metaphors:

Actiui generis sexus se turpiter horret
 Sic in passium degenerare genus.
 Femina uir factus sexus denigrat honorem,
 Ars magice Veneris hermafroditat eum.
 Predicat et subicit, fit duplex terminus idem.

Plaint of Nature, ed. James J. Sheridan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1980).

⁴² See Macrobius, *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, I.2.17, and discussion of this passage above.

⁴³ The description of Natura's physical appearance and attire draws on a multitude of texts, including analogous descriptions of female goddesses in Martianus's *De nuptiis* and Boethius's *De consolacione*.

Gramatice leges ampliat ille nimis.
 Se negat esse uirum Nature, factus in arte
 Barbarus (1: 15–22)

[The active sex shudders in disgrace as it sees itself degenerate into the passive sex. A man turned woman blackens the fair name of his sex. The witchcraft of Venus turns him into a hermaphrodite. He is subject and predicate: one and the same term is given a double ending. Man here extends too far the laws of grammar. He denies himself to be a man by Nature, having been made barbarous through art.]

These “artful” violations of “natural” sexual norms convey Alan’s troubled perspective on human sexuality and the implications of Natura’s involvement in it, a view quite changed from Bernard’s more optimistic, or at least matter-of-fact, rendering of sexual necessity. At the end of the *Cosmographia*, Physis provisions the human body with the means of sexual reproduction, offering an image of its ideal, but still only theoretical operation; in the *De planctu*, picking up just where Bernard leaves off, Alan imagines those “membra” put to practice. But far from replicating at the microcosmic level the universal “continuum,” a chain in which “nichil dissipabile vel abruptum” [nothing is out of order or broken off] (II.4.0: 6–7),⁴⁴ the outcome for Alan is one of glaring *disorder*. The book of nature, subjected to false and faulty copyists, has become garbled, its language “[b]arbarus.” Alan’s handling of the trope of textuality suggests that nature’s design is a good but vulnerable order in need of constant and careful supervision.

In her first speech, Natura introduces herself to the bewildered narrator and describes her multiple operations, which include an intimate custodial role in human life. She pauses to express her sorrow that ignorance and weakness have clouded the narrator’s intellect and caused him to forget “tue nutricis familiari cognitione” [an intimate knowledge of [his] foster-mother] (6: 16–17). She relates how, as *vicaria dei*, she has nurtured the poet from his earliest years, even having produced his body from primordial matter.⁴⁵ Recalling the reformation of Silva in the *Cosmographia*,

⁴⁴ Plato similarly describes the self-sufficiency of the universe in the *Timaeus* 33C–D, 26: 5–10: “Neque enim quicquam ex eo recedebat nec erat accedendi facultas cunctis coercitis, sed corruptela partium intra se senescentium uicem quandam obtinebat cibatus idemque ut ageret et pateretur etiam omnia mundi globus partibus suis intra se agentibus ac perpetientibus. Nec uero manu ei necessarias esse duxit, cum nihil superesset comprehendendum, nec pedes.”

⁴⁵ Natura asks the poet how he could forget her, the one “que a tua ineunte etate, dei auctoris uicaria rata dispensatione, legitimum tue uite ordinaui curriculum?” [who, acting by an established covenant as the deputy of God, the creator, has from your earliest years established the appointed course of your life?] *De planctu*, 6: 21–2. This scene, of course, recalls Lady Philosophy’s arrival in the *De consolacione*, book I, prose 2, and is echoed in the first passus of *Piers Plowman* when Holy Church reintroduces herself to the narrator, who

Natura describes how she took pity on his motley appearance and “humane speciei signaculo sigillau i eamque, honestis orphanam figurarum ornamentis, melioribus formarum uestibus honestau i” [stamped you with the stamp of human species and with the improved dress of form brought dignity to that species when it was bereft of adornments of shape] (6: 24–6). Finally, Natura relates how she ordered the senses to stand guard in the body and protect it from outside harm. She did all this, she says, so that the body might be married to the soul, to which she has given various intellectual faculties, including the powers of reason, judgment, and recollection.

This passage summarizes the extent to which Natura’s powers have increased in Alan’s poem, for here she is shown to combine the roles of Noys, Physis, and Urania. Like Noys, Natura now shapes bodies out of primordial matter and refines these bodies with the mark of the human species. Like Physis, Natura carefully arranges the members of the body and sets the hierarchy of sensory and mental faculties as defenses against external attack. And, finally, it is Natura, rather than her cosmic sister Urania, who now ordains these intellectual faculties as gifts of the soul.

In describing the manner by which Natura creates man, Alan borrows openly from Bernard’s poem and their common source, the *Timaeus*, describing man as a microcosm of the larger universe:

Ego illa sum, que ad exemplarem mundane machine similitudinem hominis exemplau i naturam, ut in ea uelut in speculo ipsius mundi scripta natura compareat. Sicut enim quatuor elementorum concors Discordia, unica pluralitas, consonantia dissonans, consensus dissentiens, mundialis regie structuram conciliat, sic quatuor complexionum compar disparitas, inequalis equalitas, difformis conformitas, diuersa idemptitas, edificium corporis humani conpaginat. (6: 43–50)

[For I am the one who formed the nature of man according to the exemplar and likeness of the structure of the universe so that in him, as in a mirror of the universe itself, Nature’s lineaments might be there to see. For just as concord in discord, unity in plurality, harmony in disharmony, agreement in disagreement of the four elements unite the parts of the structure of the royal palace of the universe, so too, similarity in dissimilarity, equality in inequality, like in unlike, identity in diversity of four combinations bind together the house of the human body.]

Amidst this balance, however, Natura reveals an ongoing war of opposites at work within man. On Reason’s advice she ordained that man’s capacity for rational thought would be in continuous strife with his sensual impulses, so

has failed to recognize her: “‘Holi chirche I am,’ quo she: þou ouȝtest me to knowe./ I vnderfeng þee first and þi feiþ þee tauȝte’” (B.1.75–6).

that, just as the planets strain against their established courses, man would have to strive against the physical urges of his body in order to reap the benefits of the course of reason. This war between sensuality and reason, the marriage of flesh and spirit, holds great consequence for humankind, as Natura herself grants. While one aspect of human existence, the unchecked desire of the material body, “hominem in bestiam degenerando transmutat” [corrupting man, changes him into a beast], the divine part of man, the reason of his soul, “hominem in deum potentialiter transfigurat” [has the power to transform man into a god] (6: 59–61). These lines exemplify the ambivalent value of nature in Alan’s allegories: on the one hand, nature, defined as the material conditions of earthly life, drags man down to the level of a beast, threatening to overcome human exceptionality in creation; but on the other hand, nature, defined as the eternal principle that animates all life and which man shares with the greater cosmos, promises to exalt human beings beyond their mortal existence.

A direct representative of God, empowered to set norms for human behavior, Natura is a moral force in the *De planctu*, as elsewhere in Alan’s writings. But, as Barbara Newman has observed, Alan “confers authority on Nature with one hand and withdraws it with the other.”⁴⁶ Natura herself, in fact, carefully voices her subordination to God:

Eius opus sufficiens, meum opus deficiens. Eius opus mirabile, meum opus mutabile. Ille innascibilis, ego nata. Ille faciens, ego facta. Ille mei opifex operis, ego opus opificis. Ille operatur ex nichilo, ego mendico opus ex aliquo. Ille suo operatur in numine, ego operor illius sub nomine. Ille rem solo nutu iubet existere, mea uero operatio operationis est nota diuine. (6: 128–44)

[His work is complete, mine is defective; His work is the object of admiration, mine is subject to alteration. He is ungeneratable, I was generated; He is the creator, I was created; He is the creator of my work, I am the work of the Creator; He creates from nothing, I beg the material for my work from someone; He works by His own divinity, I work in His name; He, by His will alone, bids things come into existence, my work is but a sign of the work of God.]

In raising a topic on which Bernard’s poem is silent, Alan emphasizes the limitations of Natura’s power and understanding. Of the mystery of human salvation Natura is ignorant: “Sed ab hoc secunde natiuitatis misterio mee professionis ministerium relegatur” [But my professional services are set aside in the mystery of this second birth] (6: 144–5).⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, p. 69.

⁴⁷ By contrast, nature and theological mysteries are greatly intertwined in *Piers Plowman*, as I discuss in subsequent chapters.

In this matter Natura defers to Theology, another female personification, whose knowledge is not based upon the operation of reason, which becomes confused by the mysteries of Christian doctrine, but rather upon faith. Nevertheless, in describing these two paths to knowledge, Alan maintains that the two approaches are “non aduersa sed diuersa” [not opposed but different] (6: 152), though it is enough to keep Natura and Theology in separate spheres: “Ego quasi bestialiter in terra deambulo, illa celi militat in secreto” [I walk around the earth like a brute beast, she marches in the hidden places of heaven] (6: 157–8). The distinction between Natura and the figure Urania that Alan had erased by assigning the gift of reason to Natura’s provision for humankind here reappears as a division between Natura and Theology, a figure who does not appear in Bernard’s poem but now assumes the celestial place formerly occupied by Urania. By having Natura herself attest the boundaries of her dominion, Alan strengthens his assertion of the limits of reason and natural philosophy with regard to the higher faculty of theology and its instrument, faith.

Alan’s ambivalence about Natura’s capacities is nowhere more apparent than when Natura describes her appointment of Venus as her own *subuicaria*. In an echo of Bernard’s designation of the “twin genii,” Natura charges Venus with holding together the “humani generis seriem indefessa continuatione” [unbroken linkage in the chain of the human race] so that it should not be severed (“intercisa”) by the Fates (8: 244–6). Alan here returns to the trope of scribal instantiation to represent the production of species. In order that Venus may assist the mass reproduction of God’s exemplars, Natura has given her “scripture calamum prepotentem” [an unusually powerful writing pen] with which to trace out the species of creation, as well as rules of orthography and grammar to which she must conform her writing. In addition, Natura provides Venus with approved parchment so that she might accomplish her work “in competentibus cedulis” [on suitable pages] (10: 30). So, like Natura and Genius, Venus is also said to instantiate form through the metaphor of writing: initially she copies the divine original with precision and adheres to norms of spelling and grammar so that there might be no discrepancy between the reproductions and their exemplars. But eventually, as Natura relates, Venus becomes bored with the repetitive nature of her task and lapses into non-normative practices, spurning Hymenaeus to live with her lover Antigenius, with whom she bears a child called Sport, thus giving rise to all the vices that now run rampant among humankind.

James Sheridan deems Natura’s delegation of these duties to Venus a “fatal flaw from an artistic point of view,” for Natura’s own actions seem to undercut her moral rectitude elsewhere. “So far she has been a noble and tragic figure,” Sheridan comments. “We can no longer look at her this

way.”⁴⁸ Yet while Natura’s delegation to Venus does prompt a reassessment of Natura’s status—an opportunity that, as we shall see, Jean de Meun happily exploits—the move is no flaw in Alan’s craft but in fact consistent with the poet’s efforts to place limits on Natura’s capacities throughout the poem. While appointing Venus suggests a lack of judgment that reflects the limitations Natura herself acknowledges, she does not install Venus with malicious intent or even carelessly—in fact, Natura takes every precaution to educate and instruct Venus in normative practices. Rather than damning Natura, this episode points the finger of blame back at human beings who, in the internal war between reason and sensuality, give reign to the flesh and indulge in sexual practices outside the normative rules set down by Natura. As the barbarous grammar of non-normative sexuality mars nature’s “book,” so, too, she reveals, human disobedience tears at the texture of creation embodied by her dress:

plerique homines in suam matrem uiciorum armentur iniuriis, inter se et ipsam maximum chaos dissensionis firmantes, in me uiolentas manus uiolenter iniciunt et mea sibi particulatim uestimenta diripiunt et, quam reuerentie deberent honore uestire, me uestibus orphanatam, quantum in ipsis est, cogunt meretricialiter lupanare. (8: 165–70)

[many men arm themselves with vices to injure their own mother and establish between her and them the chaos of ultimate dissension, in their violence they lay violent hands on me, tear my clothes in shreds to have pieces for themselves and, as far as in them lies, compel me, whom they should clothe in honour and reverence, to be stripped of my clothes and to go like a harlot to a brothel.]

Natura complains that all creation obeys her universal law except the anomalous, rebellious humankind: “solus homo anomala exceptione seducitur” [man alone exempts himself by a non-conformist withdrawal] (8: 10–13). Recapitulating the narrator’s initial failure to recognize the goddess, this image of the viciousness with which human beings treat “sua mater” [their own mother] demonstrates humanity’s alienation from its true nature and the natural understanding of truth that human nature contains.

At the end of the *De planctu* Nature’s priest Genius excommunicates unrepentant sinners and warns the rest of humankind to adhere to Natura’s laws lest they face the same fate. Like Natura’s robe, torn by human hands, the intrinsic goodness of nature is tragically obscured by humanity’s present state of sinfulness. But Genius’s admonition offers some hope, too, for it not only suggests that nature is a guide to moral

⁴⁸ Sheridan, *Plaint*, p. 147, n. 44.

living, but that human beings have the capacity to reject sin. Thus, in the poem's conclusion, Alan's confidence in nature remains more or less intact, though the work as a whole limits natural capacity. Alan's second epic poem, the *Anticlaudianus*, goes even further in this direction.

The *Anticlaudianus* shares many of the concerns of Alan's earlier work and again features Natura as a central character. The work's title refers to the Latin poet Claudian whose *Against Rufinus* purports to describe a thoroughly wicked man; by contrast, Alan's work imagines a man free of any fault or weakness, a "diuinus homo" part man and part god, whose "probitas multorum crimina penset" [goodness outweighs the crimes of the many] (1: 236, 233).⁴⁹ Though some of Alan's contemporaries and later medieval readers understood this perfect man to represent Christ, modern scholars tend to interpret the "new man" as an ideal *imitation* of Christ, through the capacities of his divine component, the soul, combined with the highest of earthly achievements, philosophical wisdom and courtly virtues: in other words, every attainment a man might achieve through his natural capacities, augmented by a divine soul.⁵⁰ Alan's perfect man "is 'divine,' not because he is God incarnate, but because he is fully and perfectly human, possessing every gift of Nature and Fortune—including free will and the determination to use it in the service of virtue," Newman proposes. "He is an embodiment of the universal *humanitas*, the Platonic idea of Man, as it might appear without original sin."⁵¹ As such, Alan's "diuinus homo" represents the pinnacle of twelfth-century humanism, the optimistic conviction that human beings might "do well" through the dignity of their natures.

The poem begins as Natura, reflecting on the defects of her creation, summons the Virtues to help her create the perfect man. But when Natura has conveyed her scheme, Prudence objects that while the Virtues can, with Natura's help, produce man's body, only God can create his soul. Reason recommends that a representative of their order journey to heaven to ask God himself for a soul and, elected for the task, Prudence eventually assents. What follows is an epistemological allegory based on the model of Martianus Capella's epic treatment of the liberal arts in *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, one of the key texts of the Chartrian curriculum.⁵²

⁴⁹ Quotations of the *Anticlaudianus* refer to the edition by Robert Bossuat (Paris: J. Vrin, 1955). This translation is my own; subsequent translations are from James J. Sheridan, *Anticlaudianus* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1973).

⁵⁰ For some examples of the medieval reception of Alan's perfect man as Christ, see Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, pp. 83–6.

⁵¹ Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, p. 82.

⁵² See the edition by James Willis, *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1983). An English translation is available in *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts*,

At Reason's command, the Seven Liberal Arts build a chariot that will carry Prudence to heaven. Concord fits the parts of the chariot together and Reason offers five horses representing the senses to pull it. Under power of the Liberal Arts and with Reason as her guide, Prudence journeys upward through the atmosphere to the ether and beyond into the firmament, recalling Natura's educative journey in the *Cosmographia*.

But at the outer boundary of the universe, the horses of Prudence's chariot refuse to go any further, signifying the limitations of human reason and the informing senses of the body, the limitations, in short, of natural capacity. The chariot's failure also presents a keen indictment of the liberal arts, which Alan had enumerated and praised in great detail in the previous two books—while philosophy may carry man a long way in his search for truth, the disciplines of the *trivium* and *quadrivium* are finally limited in their potential for attaining knowledge of the highest mysteries. Reprising her role in the *De planctu*, Theology finally offers Prudence a way forward. Together they investigate elemental and meteorological phenomena before ascending to a realm of eternal joy populated by angels, a place where the heavenly light shines so brightly that Prudence falls into a trance. Here Alan draws another distinction between intellective modes as Theology cannot fully rouse Prudence and must ask Faith to come to her aid. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, Alan's epistemological allegory, and its characteristic exhaustion of personifications who successively fail at the limits of their expertise or capacity, resonates in the fits and starts of Will's not cosmic but earthbound search for "kynde knowynge."

In a scene unimaginable in the *Cosmographia* (where Bernard's Godhead is shrouded in the mysterious depths of Tugaton), Prudence finally enters the palace of God where she comes face to face with the deity and asks him for a soul. Noys, who returns for a brief cameo in her cosmic role, seeks an exemplar, and God creates the soul, giving it to Prudence with instructions for its safe keeping. Natura fashions a body from the elements and Concord, with the help of Arithmetic and Music, joins body and soul together. The Virtues and the Liberal Arts each contribute their particular gifts to the New Man's perfection, but no sooner is he made than the figure Rumor begins to spread word of the new creation and the wicked Allecto rouses the Vices to wage a full-scale *psychomachia*. The poem concludes, however, not in strife but in celebration as Natura and the Virtues rally to aid the New Man, who, victorious, rules over the earth in a new Golden Age.

Similar to her role in the *Cosmographia*, in the *Anticlaudianus* Natura is characterized as a student, an instigator, and an advocate, but her creative powers are limited. Natura promulgates universal laws and possesses profound knowledge of God's own providential operations, but Natura does not herself give shape to the universe, as she had in the *De planctu*; instead here Alan puts Natura back into her limited role as witness and imitator of Noys's primary creativity in the *Cosmographia*. Her privileged vision enables Natura to observe the formation of matter into the orderly cosmos but not to participate herself in this first creation. Moreover, as Prudence and Reason demonstrate before the council of virtues, Natura does not have the power to produce a soul. As in the *De planctu*, Natura's works remain subordinate to God's operations, the scope of her activity limited: "Diuinum creat ex nichilo, Natura caduca/ Procreat ex aliquo; Deus imperat, illa ministrat;/ Hic regit, illa facit; hic instruit, illa docetur" [The Divine creates from nothing. Nature makes mortal things from some material; God commands, she serves; He directs, she acts; He instructs, she accepts instruction] (2: 72–4).⁵³ As White notes, in this poem Alan serves Natura with "something of a demotion . . . a stricter binding to the material."⁵⁴ Similarly, Newman suggests that Natura serves a kind of penance in the *Anticlaudianus*: while Prudence traverses the firmament, Natura is grounded, bound to dwell on the earth, her powers curtailed as apparent punishment for having appointed Venus her *subuicaria* so that she might herself be free to relocate to the more agreeable climes of the heavens.⁵⁵ The entire poem suggests Natura's limitations, most forcefully in the goddess's inability to create a human soul and Prudence's need, as a natural virtue sent forth on Natura's behalf, for guidance into the mysterious realm beyond the edge of the outer firmament.

Yet despite these pronounced limitations, Natura remains a moral and generative force in the *Anticlaudianus* as she was in the *De planctu*. Just as she had been the impetus for the ordering of matter in the *Cosmographia*, here too Natura inspires the creation of the New Man, a perfect man to redeem all the failings of previous generations. In fact, when the Virtues gather round the New Man to endow him with their various gifts, educating him in the ways of goodness, Honestas instructs him to look to nature as a guide for moral behavior: "Naturam diligit, illud/ Quod facinus peperit damnans, quod praua uoluntas/ Edidit, amplectens quicquid Natura creauit" [Love Nature, condemning what villainy has spawned or an evil will has brought forth and embracing whatever Nature has created] (7: 208–10). And when the New Man, aided by the array of

⁵³ Cf. *De planctu* 6: 128–44.

⁵⁴ White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*, p. 98.

⁵⁵ Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, p. 79.

Virtues, successfully overcomes Allecto and her army of Vices, he shares his triumph with Natura, appropriately enough as the plan she originated comes to its fulfillment: "Pugna cadit, cedit iuueni Victoria, surgit/ Virtus, succumbit Viciū, Natura triumphat,/ Regnat Amor, nusquam Discordia, Fedus ubique" [The battle ceases. Victory falls to the New Man. Virtue rises. Vice sinks. Nature triumphs, Love rules, nowhere is there Disagreement but Agreement everywhere] (9: 384–6). As in her earliest appearances as a personification in the works of Statius and Claudian, Natura here remains man's ally, both in guiding man toward moral behavior and in equipping him for the struggle against vice.

NATURE'S DESCENT: VERNACULARITY, JEAN DE MEUN, AND SEXUALITY

By the thirteenth century, nature is no longer a sacred subject. Vernacular Natura allegories treat the idealism of the twelfth century with varied measures of skepticism, irreverence, and irony, bringing Natura's moral authority into doubt, especially over the issue of her involvement in human sexuality. Natura enters the vernacular in French by way of the *Roman de la Rose*, begun around 1225 by Guillaume de Lorris and continued by Jean de Meun between 1268–85, and in English with Chaucer's translation of the *Roman* in the late 1360s and his own original contribution to the tradition, the *Parliament of Fowls*, which is generally dated to around 1380.⁵⁶ In the last decade of the fourteenth century, Gower also drew on the tradition in the *Confessio Amantis*, and, a bit later, Lydgate would do so in his translation of Deguileville's *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine* and in *Reson and Sensuallyte*, a partial translation of a fourteenth-century French text, *Les*

⁵⁶ For the *Roman*, I follow the dates given by Noah D. Guynn, "Le Roman de la rose," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*, ed. Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 48. Chaucer is presumed to have translated the *Roman* into English, since he is reprimanded for doing so in the prologue to *The Legend of Good Women* (F 327–31; G 253–7). The extant Middle English version is fragmentary, however, and the authenticity of some of the fragments is doubtful. See Larry D. Benson's preface to the text in *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. 686. On the dating of the *Parliament*, see A.J. Minnis, with V.J. Scattergood and J.J. Smith, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 256–61. Larry D. Benson proposes that Chaucer wrote the poem to commemorate the marriage negotiations of Richard II and Anne of Bohemia, setting the date between 1380 and 1382. See Benson, "The Occasion of *The Parliament of Fowls*," in *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English Literature in Honor of Morton W. Bloomfield*, ed. Benson and Siegfried Wenzel (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 1982), pp. 123–44.

Échechs amoureux.⁵⁷ But the Natura of Langland's contemporaries was not the goddess envisaged by Bernard Silvestris and Alan of Lille. While the vernacular Natura remains God's deputy, her concerns are increasingly mundane, her moral authority progressively more suspect as the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries continued to demarcate the realm of the natural from the divine. In extending the distance between nature and God, these vernacular formulations fulfill a downward trajectory established by the founders of the Natura allegory. Against this debasement, I will argue, Langland deploys Kynde in a radical recuperation of Natura's moral and indeed divine potential.

From Latin origins into the vernacular, we have seen how Natura's role ranges from cosmic to mundane as the figure moves along a path of secularization. Some, such as Statius and Boethius, designate Natura as the force that binds and orders the universe, setting her powers on par with those of God and even producing a near identity between God and nature. In the arc that begins with Bernard's *Cosmographia*, however, Natura's role becomes steadily circumscribed and, if not entirely earthbound, certainly earth-centered. Rather than performing functions nearly indistinguishable from the work of the divine, now Natura, as *vicaria dei*, becomes more clearly God's subordinate, the executor of divine commands. In the Chartrian context, Natura's reign over the terrestrial realm serves humanist ends: even as her cosmic role becomes diminished, her importance in relation to the life of humankind becomes more direct. Natura creates the human body, in Bernard's version with the help of her sister Physis, and carefully joins it to the immortal soul. Natura is likewise a principle of growth and regeneration, the mother of all creation from whom the abundance of the earth and all the varied species of life spring forth. From her association with the careful ordering of the body and the provision of the twin genii in the *Cosmographia* to Alan's metaphor of the mint in which species are continually stamped into being, like from like, the figure Natura takes a supervisory role over sexual reproduction, the means of mechanical generation by which mortal species may achieve some manner of continuity. Natura thus encourages the "proper," strictly procreative use of the sexual organs and, in the *De planctu* as later in

⁵⁷ On nature in Gower see White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*, pp. 174–219 and Simpson, *Sciences and the Self*. R.F. Yeager discusses Gower's use of the terms *kinde* and *nature* in "Learning to Speak in Tongues: Writing Poetry for a Trilingual Culture," in *Chaucer and Gower: Difference, Mutuality, Exchange*, English Literary Studies Monograph Series 51, ed. Yeager (Victoria, BC: University of Victoria Press, 1991), pp. 115–29. On Lydgate's translation of these French allegories and their treatment of Nature, see Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, pp. 264–78. On Nature in *Les Échechs*, see White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*, pp. 155–9.

Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, she seeks to channel desire into its controlled expression in the condition of marriage. That task, however, becomes the major point of vulnerability in Alan's vision of nature, for Natura cannot both encourage sexuality and restrain its practice all at once, a paradox that becomes even more urgent in Jean de Meun's continuation of the *Roman de la Rose*.

The secular or amatory tradition of nature launched by the *Roman* demystifies and dislocates the value of nature. Indeed, as Sarah Kay has shown, far from a proponent of order, Jean's Nature is a supremely destabilizing figure.⁵⁸ Although she holds forth on philosophical and theological topics, Nature's jurisdiction is limited in the *Roman* almost exclusively to sexuality, an association first suggested by Bernard's description of the "twin genii" and more fully elaborated in the *De planctu*. While Alan insists that Natura's procreative imperative should be kept separate from the wanton sexuality of Venus, in the *Roman* Nature lends support to the God of Love and greets Venus warmly as "dame Venus, m'amie" (19313).⁵⁹ Already in the *De planctu* Natura's association with sexual reproduction, the means by which she maintains the forms and species of creation, anticipates a fissure in the normative order, as Natura struggles simultaneously to encourage and to control sexual behavior. The *Roman* places the question of Nature's involvement in human sexuality at the forefront, for here Nature assumes Venus's role at the mint in the *De planctu*. As Kay observes, Jean's continuation "laughs" at the mystification of sexuality in the Neoplatonic idealism of his sources and in the courtly tradition represented by his predecessor Guillaume de Lorris: echewing "the paradox whereby sensual love is represented in spiritual terms," Jean literalizes Alan's image of the forge as Reason describes how Nature made intercourse pleasurable in order to assure interest in the "work" of reproduction and achieve her legitimate goal of procreation.⁶⁰ Jean omits Natura's castigation of Venus and her arts in the *De planctu*; his

⁵⁸ Sarah Kay, *The Romance of the Rose*, Critical Guides to French Texts 110 (London: Grant and Cutler, 1995). Kay observes Jean's disruptive practice of transposing the hierarchies of knowledge and perception as a form of "intellectual play," two movements which "intersect in the figure of Nature, whose speech contains striking conjunctions of the material with the spiritual" (p. 96). See also Lucie Polak, "Plato, Nature, and Jean de Meun," *Reading Medieval Studies* 3 (1977): pp. 80–103, who argues that Jean's Nature voices twelfth-century Neoplatonic views while in fact advancing the naturalism of newer Aristotelian discourses.

⁵⁹ All quotations of the *Roman de la Rose* refer to the edition by Félix Lecoy, *Classiques Françaises du Moyen Age*, 3 vols (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1982), and translations are from *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Frances Horgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁶⁰ Kay, *The Romance of the Rose*, p. 94. On Jean's rejection of integumental reading as a strategy for embracing sexuality "as a subject in its own right," see Mann, "Jean de Meun

Nature instead rejoices when the God of Love and his barons resolve to storm the lady's "castle," even though their interest is by no means primarily procreative.

As Jean aligns Nature with Venus, he simultaneously distances Nature from her former associate, Reason, further signaling Nature's loss of moral authority in the secular tradition.⁶¹ In contrast to the sinful pursuit of pleasure alone, Reason explains that there is a legitimate form of love "que Nature es bestes cria,/ par quoi de leur feons chevisent/ et les aletent et norrisent" [which Nature created in the animals and that enables them to produce their young, and to suckle and rear them] (5734–6). Yet even as Reason acknowledges Nature's ingenuity in making sexual intercourse pleasurable and approves the essential innocence of this "amor naturel," Reason's comments align Nature with animal instinct. She is not responsible for humankind's unique capacities, but only for those urges which humans share with beasts.⁶² While Reason concedes the necessity of sexual reproduction and chastises those who neglect their procreative duty, human sexuality is in Reason's view an unfortunate obligation at best and potentially a dangerous distraction that must be carefully channeled toward its proper end.

As we might expect from the divergence of Nature's and Reason's views on sexuality, we also find that the faculty of reason, which separates human beings from the mere beast, is beyond Nature's purview in the *Roman*.⁶³ While Bernard and Alan had reserved the endowment of souls

and the Castration of Saturn," in *Poetry and Philosophy in the Middle Ages: A Festschrift for Peter Dronke*, ed. John Marenbon (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 309–26 (p. 326).

⁶¹ Admittedly, however, as Guynn, "*Le Roman de la rose*," observes, this loss of authority is not inflicted on Nature alone in the *Roman*. "[U]sing the techniques of a *compiler*," Guynn argues, Jean "transforms Guillaume's psychological romance into a massive polyphonic composition, one in which there are no sovereign voices, only dialectical tensions between incompatible ones" (p. 54). On Jean's destabilization of language, see Daniel Poirion, "Les Mots et les choses selon Jean de Meun," *L'Information Littéraire* 26 (1974): pp. 7–11.

⁶² White traces scholastic debates over the moral value of natural instinct, especially in relation to a well-known definition of natural law as "what nature has taught all animals." This Ulpianic definition, named for the sixth-century jurist Ulpian, suggests that human beings, led by the same impulses, should conform to the same standard of sexual behavior as the lesser animals. See White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*, pp. 20–47. I discuss notions of natural instinct and human sexuality at greater length in Chapter 3.

⁶³ On the implications of Nature's gender and her disassociation from Reason in the *Roman*, see Kay, "Women's Body of Knowledge in the *Romance of the Rose*," in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 211–35. Although my necessarily limited treatment of the *Roman* has emphasized Jean's playful debasement of Nature, Kay's work instructively points to the complexity of Jean's handling of the hierarchies of body and soul, nature and culture, and feminine and masculine roles in the poem. See also Kay, "*Romance of the Rose*," especially pp. 101–13. But for the view that even its "internally disrupted discourses . . . perpetuate antifeminism" and a

to God alone, in the earlier tradition the subdeities Noys and Natura were responsible for equipping humankind with reason. In the *Cosmographia*, Noys provides reason, but it is Natura who ultimately binds together the mortal and immortal portions of the human being, a process that requires installing reason as the faculty that negotiates between the dual impulses of body and soul to keep them joined. Alan more definitely charges Natura with the dispensation of reason in the *De planctu* and *Anticlaudianus*. As Natura explains in the *De planctu*, she marked the human soul with “rationis impressi signaculum, que sue discretionis uentilabro falsitatis inania a seriis ueritatis secernat” [the stamp of ratiocination to separate, with the winnowing-fan of judgment, vain falsehood from important truth] (6: 36–7). In the *Roman*, however, while Nature boasts that human beings are “la fins de tout mon labeur” [the culmination of [her] work], carefully crafted as “uns petiz mondes nouveaux” [a new world in miniature], she stops short of claiming responsibility for their better natures (18998, 19023). Here Nature is forced to confess her limitations:

San faille, de l'antandemant
connois je bien que vraiment
celui ne li donai je mie.
La ne s'estant pas ma baillie,
ne fui pas sage ne possant
de fere riens si connoissant.
Onques ne fis riens pardurable;
quan que je faz est corrumptible. (19025–32)

[Undoubtedly, as I know very well, it was not I, in truth, who gave him his understanding. That is outside my province, and I had neither the wisdom nor the power to make anything so intelligent. I have never made anything eternal, and whatever I make is corruptible.]

Nature draws a distinction between the forces over which she presides, the natural inclinations, and the higher faculty of reason, which enables human beings to overcome the influence of their nature:

Car quant, de sa propre nature,
contre bien et contre droiture
se veust home ou fame atourner,
reson l'an peut bien destourner,
por qu'il la croie seulement. (17057–61)

“masculinist ideology,” see Guynn, *Allegory and Sexual Ethics in the High Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), p. 170, and Minnis, *Magister Amoris: The “Roman de la rose” and Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[For when a man or woman follows his or her own nature and wishes to turn against what is good and right, reason can divert him from this path, provided only he believe in her.]

Yet, paradoxically, in a sign of the enduring complexity of nature's moral value, while Jean's Nature acknowledges that the natural inclinations of human beings often lead men and women into sin and self-destruction when they overstep the bounds of moderation, Nature also claims that it is she who gives humankind the freedom to restrain its natural impulses. Free will, the ability to overcome instincts and tendencies, is also a natural capacity of humankind. In her discussion of the true meaning of nobility, Nature proclaims that she creates every man equal, endowing all with "naturel franchise" [natural liberty]: "Que j'ai seur touz egaumant mise, / avec reson, que Diex leur done, / . . . tan test sage et bone, / semblables a Dieu et aus anges, / se mort nes an feïst estranges" [I confer it equally upon everyone, together with the reason that God gives them, which is so wise and good that it would make them like God and the angels, were it not for death, which sets men apart and makes them different] (18844–8). In this complex disclosure, Nature confesses her association with the baser elements of human existence, indicting the natural inclinations ("meurs naturex") as leading toward worldly catastrophe as well as spiritual danger (17056). She also attempts to exonerate herself in claiming to provide human beings with the freedom to resist and overcome "destiny," that is, the behavior that natural forces would otherwise produce in them.

Therefore, although Nature acquires a negative force by her association with instinct in the *Roman*, she also enables human beings to subdue those instincts upon determining that they will lead to harm. Crucially, however, the ratiocinative faculty that is "tant . . . sage et bone" [so wise and good], comes only from God (18846). Thus while Nature endows human beings with the ability to overcome their natures, she has no part in the higher faculties of the deliberative mind. Furthermore, the freedom with which Nature endows humankind is a double-edged sword: the capacity for choice leaves human beings free to reject the natural tendencies which they deem immoral and accept those which are in accord with virtuous living but likewise leaves them free to reject goodness and accept vice. This latter scenario is the situation that both Reason and Nature deplore in the *Roman*: humankind has collectively rejected the natural order that leads to procreation and the rearing of young in favor of fleeting physical pleasures, including those which do not include the possibility of procreation even as an indirect consequence.

Jean's Nature drops the mask to reveal her involvement in sexual desire with a frankness that Alan's poem never permits and, as a result, is more

closely, and less apologetically, linked with physicality and mundane concerns. In the *Roman*, Nature's thoughts are trained on "des choses/ qui sunt desouz le ciel anclores" [the things enclosed beneath the sky] (15863–4), and it is she, not Venus nor Bernard's "twin genii," who labors ceaselessly in the forge:

Mes Nature, douce et piteuse,
quant el voit que Mort l'envieuse,
antre lui et Corrupcion,
vient metre a destruction
quan qu'el treuvent,
dedanz sa forge
torjorz marteles, torjorz forge,
torjorz ses pieces renovele
par generacion novele. (15975–82)

[But gentle, compassionate Nature, seeing that jealous Death and Corruption are together destroying everything they can find, is continually in her forge, hammering and forging and renewing individuals through new generations.]

From one perspective, Nature's diligence here compensates for her negligence in the *De planctu* where she had abandoned the forge for a life of leisure in a more pleasant home in the heavens; but in revising Alan's delegation of the work of generation to Venus, Jean removes Nature's alibi, that it was the wicked Venus, and not she, under whose supervision wanton sexuality arose among humankind. Jean's Nature, tied firmly to the earthly realm, finally cannot hedge her association with sexuality: whether its forms be licit or perverse, it is she, and she alone, who instigates sexual activity.

NATURE'S QUARREL WITH GRACE: DEGUILEVILLE'S *PÈLERINAGE DE LA VIE HUMAINE*

Before returning in this chapter's conclusion to Chaucer's *Parliament*, it remains to discuss one final text in the *Rose* tradition, Guillaume de Deguileville's *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine* (c. 1330–1, revised c. 1355). Deguileville's *Vie* is in fact the first dream vision in a three-part spiritual pilgrimage, comprising the *Pèlerinage de l'âme* (c. 1355–8) and the *Pèlerinage de Jhesuchrist* (c. 1358).⁶⁴ A spiritualization of the *Rose*'s

⁶⁴ On the dates of each of the three parts of the series, see Guillaume de Deguileville, *The Pilgrimage of Human Life (Le Pèlerinage de la vie humaine)*, trans. Eugene Clabdy (New York: Garland, 1992), pp. xiii–xiv.

quest—turned, in Deguileville's hands, to pastoral ends⁶⁵—the *Pèlerinage* trilogy makes a crucial contribution to the tradition that I describe as Kynde's literary history. Enormously popular and translated widely by the fifteenth century, the *Pèlerinage* was known to Chaucer (he translated part of the *Vie* as "An ABC") and many have seen its influence on *Piers Plowman*, too.⁶⁶ John Burrow describes the three-part *Pèlerinage* as a unique model for the "multiple structure" of linked dreams and dreams-within-dreams in *Piers Plowman*.⁶⁷ Emily Steiner puts the connection in the strongest terms: "*Piers Plowman* could be said to be the culmination of Deguileville's penitential project and a true English heir to the *Rose* tradition."⁶⁸

As such, the *Vie* acts as a bridging text, linking the Chartrian Natura from Jean's *Roman de la Rose*, whose quest for erotic love Deguileville purports to spiritualize, to the fourteenth century and forward to the fifteenth century, as attested by Lydgate's verse translation of the first recension of the *Vie* (1426) and an anonymous Middle English prose translation (c. 1430).⁶⁹ Deguileville's aims are spiritual, but like its predecessors in the secular tradition, the *Vie* widens the gap between divinity and nature. It insists on the incommensurability of the realms of Nature and Grace, the very distinction that Langland blurs in the figure Kynde.

Like the Chartrian Natura, Deguileville's Nature arrives on the scene to advance a complaint, this time not against formless chaos, as in the *Cosmographia*, nor against human misbehavior, as in the *De planctu*. Rather, she directs her grievance against Grace Dieu, who, she claims, has taken liberties with the laws of nature. The debate between Nature and Grace arises when Deguileville's pilgrim narrator witnesses Moses

⁶⁵ On the the *Pèlerinage*'s use of "craft language" to conceptualize lay instruction, see Lisa H. Cooper, *Artisans and Narrative Craft in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 106–45 (p. 107).

⁶⁶ See, for example, Owen, *Piers Plowman: A Comparison*; Rosemary Woolf, "The Tearing of the Pardon," in *Piers Plowman: Critical Approaches*, ed. S.S. Hussey (London: Methuen, 1969), pp. 50–75; John Burrow, *Langland's Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), pp. 113–18; Galloway, *Penn Commentary*, pp. 9, 150–1, and *passim*; Rosenfeld, *Ethics and Enjoyment*, pp. 111–34; and Steiner, *Reading Piers Plowman*, pp. 25–6.

⁶⁷ See Burrow, *Langland's Fictions*, p. 8.

⁶⁸ Steiner, *Reading Piers Plowman*, p. 13.

⁶⁹ Lydgate's translation is edited by F.J. Furnivall and Katherine B. Locock, *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, 3 vols, EETS c.s. 77, 83, 92 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1899, 1901, 1904; reprinted Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint, 1973). The Middle English prose translation is *The Pilgrimage of the Lyfe of the Manhode*, ed. Avril Henry, 2 vols, EETS 28, 292 (London: Oxford University Press, 1985, 1988). For a description of textual history of the *Pèlerinage* and its many translations, see *The Pilgrimage of Human Life*, trans. Clasby, xv, xxxv–xlvi.

taking his meal: unsatisfied with mere bread and wine, the priestly Moses transforms them into a Eucharistic feast of flesh and blood. When the narrator presses his interlocutor Reason for an explanation, Reason demurs, proclaiming the mystery beyond his ken. He would not have been so astonished, he adds, had Moses made a bird from an egg or a flute from a grain of barley, for these transformations follow the course of nature and exploit natural potential (1483–4). But turning bread to flesh is “[c]ontre nature et contre usage” [against nature and custom] (1495), and soon Nature herself arrives to defend her privileges.

Nature’s debate with Grace in book 1 of Deguileville’s *Vie* establishes a division between the realms that each figure represents and insists that miracles, or divine incursions into the physical realm, are categorically *unnatural*. While it is the Eucharist in particular that prompts Nature’s complaint, Nature’s allegations against Grace are extensive, comprising the burning bush of Exodus 3: 2, wherein God reveals himself to Moses; the staffs of Moses and Aaron, which spring to life as serpent and blooming tree, respectively, in Exodus 4: 2–4 and Numbers 17: 23; Christ’s transformation of water into wine at the Wedding at Cana, recounted in John 2: 9; and, perhaps the most astounding of all of Grace’s transgressions into Nature’s realm, the virgin birth itself. In each of these examples, Nature complains, Grace has bent the rules; that is, the usual operations of natural causality.

In keeping with the trend we have observed over the course of the tradition, in the *Vie*, Nature is a female *subvicaria* whose purview is strictly limited to the sublunary sphere. But here she revels in her jurisdiction, telling Grace that she has no right to meddle in it:

Entre moi et vous fu assise
 Fu bonne qui nous devise,
 A fin que ne mesfëissons
 Ne de rien n’entrepreïssons
 L’une a l’autre, c’est la roe
 Ou en touz temps la lune roe;
 Celle roe si nous depart,
 A chascune donne sa part,
 De hors est la vostre partie . . .
 La endroit ne claim nulle rien,
 Mais par dedens trestout est mien.
 Maïstresse sui des elemens,
 Des impressions et des vens
 De faire variations
 Et diverses mutations . . .
 Tout faiz tourner et tendre a fin,

Tout varier soir et matin,
 Nouvelles choses faiz venir
 Et les viez choses departir.⁷⁰ (1541–9, 1557–62, 1565–8)

[A boundary was set up between you and me, dividing us so that we do not wrong or mistreat each other in any way. This is the sphere in which the moon always turns and this sphere separates us and gives each of us her part. Beyond it is your territory . . . In that realm I claim nothing at all, but within this one everything is mine. I am mistress of the elements, of the winds and the weather, of changes and variations of all sorts . . . I make all things turn and move toward their ends. I make all things vary, morning and evening. I make new things appear and old things depart.]

Nature's boast recalls similar discussions of the bounds of her realm in the earlier tradition, as when Alan's Natura dutifully voices her creative subordination to God, whose work is "sufficiens" [complete] while hers is "deficiens" [defective] (see *De planctu* 6: 128–44, and compare Nature's acknowledgment of her limitations in the *Roman*, lines 19025–32, both discussed above). While Deguileville retains Nature's elaboration of a sublunary division, only in his rendition does Nature fail to recognize it as a sign of her subordination to a higher power.

Against Nature's charges, Grace proffers a series of reasoned arguments, but ultimately wins the debate by dint of her superior rank: she reminds Nature that she is the mistress and Nature only her "chamberiere" [servant] (1706). While acknowledging the boundary between their two jurisdictions, Grace insists that it only restricts Nature, not Grace, whose authority is limitless: "Entrer i puis quant je vourrai/ Et ja a vous n'en parlerai" [I can enter when I want and I will never say anything to you about it] (1727–8). Initially, Grace attempts to explain Nature's subordination by referring to her as "mon oustil ou instrument" [my tool or instrument] (1796), carefully adding that she does not *need* to use Nature instrumentally, nor is she constrained to do so, but makes things "through nature" only when it pleases her (1800). Paraphrasing Isaiah, Grace insists on the proper hierarchy of craftsman and instrument, warning Nature that she should no sooner question Grace's authority than an ax should dispute with the carpenter, or a pot with the potter.⁷¹

But, at least in the first version of the *Vie*, Nature here extends the debate: the fact that she *is* Grace's instrument and servant means that Grace should not create without her. Exasperated, Grace attempts to

⁷⁰ Citations of the French text are from *Le pèlerinage de la vie humaine*, ed. J.J. Stürzinger (London: Nichols and Sons, for the Roxburghe Club, 1893), and English translations are from Clasby.

⁷¹ See Isaiah 10: 15 and 29: 16, 45, and compare Romans 9: 20–1.

abandon the analogy of the craftsman and his instruments altogether, disavowing it as mere metaphor, a “similitude” suited to Nature’s “engine rude” [rude wit] (1933–4).⁷² Underscoring her earlier claim to creative sovereignty, Grace reiterates that unlike a carpenter, she does not need an ax to make things: “Sans coignie puis bien ouvrer,/ Forgier, doler et charpenter,/ Sans oustil et sans instrument” [I can work well without an ax. I can fashion, hew and shape without a tool or an instrument] (1951–3). But as Lisa Cooper observes, even as Grace disavows her need of an instrument, her use of craft language persists: “Grace cannot escape the artisanal metaphors in which her self-understanding, or at least her self-expression is grounded.”⁷³ Grace’s work remains conceptualized as physical craft: she fashions, hews, and shapes (“forgier,” “doler,” and “charpenter”). In attempting to reject the instrumental and the material, Grace’s argument paradoxically suggests “it might be precisely through such imagery that the authority of the spiritual (Grace) over the natural (Nature) can be most fully apprehended.”⁷⁴ The persistence of what Cooper calls “artisanal imagery” recalls the figure of *Deus artifex*, one of the models for Natura in the early tradition.⁷⁵ Here Nature’s instrumentality keeps God’s hands clean, as it were, but the return of craft language despite Grace’s attempts to dematerialize her creative process suggests the enduring appeal of the iconography of God as craftsman, which is widespread in medieval literature and art (see, for example, Fig. 0.1 in this book’s Preface). And while Grace’s “self-understanding” and “self-expression” seem to rely on metaphors of craft, it might more generally be said that such metaphors are necessary to mediate human understanding of divine occupations. Although Deguileville attempts to disavow this language as mere “similitude,” the association suggests an opportunity for recasting the work of Grace as craft or art, which is precisely what I will argue Langland does in *Piers Plowman*. For it is not only that the “engine rude” [rude wit] (1933–4) needs material examples in order to conceptualize grace, but that grace actually has the effect of craft or art, a claim Langland makes explicit in appropriating artisanal attributes to Kynde, who is a composite of Deguileville’s disputants, Nature and Grace.

⁷² Indeed, Deguileville removes the reference to Nature as Grace’s instrument in the second recension of the *Vie*.

⁷³ Cooper, *Artisans and Narrative Craft*, p. 132.

⁷⁴ Cooper, *Artisans and Narrative Craft*, p. 132.

⁷⁵ On God as Artifex, see Curtius, *European Literature*, “God as Maker,” pp. 544–6; Cooper, *Artisans and Narrative Craft*, p. 7; and my discussion of Plato’s notion of the Artifex above.



Fig. 1.1 Nature Kneels before Grace Dieu

Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, Manuscript W.141, fol. 14v., © 2015 Walters Art Museum, used under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 license: <<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>

In the *Vie* Nature ultimately acquiesces to Grace Dieu's arguments and returns to her subordinate role, a position illustrated in manuscript representations of Nature's genuflection before Grace (Fig. 1.1). Far from her dazzling beauty and regal appearance in the Chartrian allegories, Deguileville's Nature is "[u]ne vielle" [an old woman] brought to her knees (1505). Gone is the integumental symbolism of her traditional gown: rather, through an inversion that anticipates Chaucer's literalization in the *Parliament* (where the birds have come right off of Nature's gown), Deguileville's Nature proclaims that she dresses the earth in her "robes" [garments] (1569), changing its clothing as appropriate from season to season. Nature herself, however, wears modest attire suited to a servant.

Nature's posture and appearance in acquiescence to Grace, her mistress, highlight the *Vie's* departure from the majestic status the Chartrian allegories had previously accorded the figure. Here she is not only old and plainly dressed, but as in the *Roman de la Rose*, she can be abused. During their debate, Grace lets loose a barrage of insults, charging Nature with pride, drunkenness, arrogance, and indiscretion (1660–74). Her

agedness does not confer authority or wisdom, but “[p]our viellesce qui la radote” [old age has made her foolish] (2912). Finally, Grace alleges, Nature is like “le porc sauvage” (1691) [a wild pig], satisfied with its meal of acorns: earthbound, she never looks to the heavens to contemplate higher things, including the source of her sustenance. In her carnality, Nature fails to recognize that the sublunary world she considers her province is entirely the gift of Grace, who gave it to her “de ma courtoisie” [out of courtesy] (1711).

Grace’s ascendancy in the encounter with Nature is not, however, the end of their strife in the *Vie*. Their respective positions come into conflict once more, but this time they are argued by their surrogates, Wisdom, an ally of Grace, and Aristotle, one of Nature’s clerks. This second debate, moreover, takes place within Grace’s own narration, not in the present time of the pilgrim-narrator’s vision, but as an account of an old quarrel between the two factions, once again ignited by the mystery of the Eucharist. Grace first recounts the labors of Charity, who brings grain from heaven, plants it in the earth, harvests, and mills it; and then she tells how Charity employs Wisdom to bake “ce pain qui est desguises” [the strange bread] (294) that will become the Eucharist. The bread must be cleverly made so that, though small in size, it fully satisfies anyone who eats it. Wisdom does this and more, producing a loaf that can be endlessly divided and yet each piece remains “aussi grant/ Comme ensemble trestoute” [as great as the whole] (2906–7). This violation of reason—that a part might be as great as the whole—angers Nature, but she doesn’t dare to contravene Grace again. Instead, she sends her clerk, Aristotle, to argue her position, which is, indeed, Aristotle’s own position in the *Metaphysics*, where he establishes that a part cannot be equal to or greater than the whole to which it belongs.⁷⁶ In the *Vie*, Aristotle debates the issue with Wisdom, refuting the notion that “le vaissel ou la maison/ Mendre soit de ce qui est ens” [a vessel or dwelling should be smaller than what is inside it] (2934–5). Wisdom’s rebuttal turns on the analogy of a human heart: as Aristotle acknowledges, though the heart is a small vessel, its capacity, which is to say, its desire, is virtually limitless. Indeed, only the sovereign good can fill it, and this perfect good must be greater than the world, an Aristotelian truth that forces the philosopher to grant that, in the example of the heart fulfilled by the sovereign good, a precedent exists for a vessel that is smaller than that which it contains.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, book 7, chapters 10–11.

⁷⁷ Aristotle defines contemplation as the sovereign good in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 10, chapter 8. On Aristotle’s discussion of desire and the sovereign good in the *Pèlerinage*, see Rosenfeld, *Ethics and Enjoyment*, pp. 122–5.

At the end of this sequence, Nature and Aristotle have both been vanquished, by Grace and by Wisdom, respectively. But they are not set fully at odds with their sparring partners. As Wisdom says in sending Aristotle to report his defeat, even though Nature resents her inability to contest her mistress's actions, she remains "la chamberiere" [the chambermaid] of Grace (3285–6). The ties binding Wisdom to Nature and to Aristotle likewise remain in place, for she is their teacher: she refers to Nature as "m'escolier" [my student] (3286), and Aristotle hails her as "m'amie" [my friend], signaling their ongoing intimacy (2930). Wisdom describes how she instructed both of them in her two schools, the first a school of arts, in which she taught Nature how to make "choses merveilles,/ Et soutilles et gracieuses" [wonderful, intricate, and elegant things] (3000–2). In the other school she taught Aristotle the sciences of discernment and disputation, and there he learned everything that Nature knows, as Wisdom recounts, "la te furent revelez/ De nature tous les secrez,/ Quar quanqu'a Nature aprenoe/ Tantost apres le te disoie,/ Nom pas que riens faire en peusses,/ Mes que bien jugier en sceusses" [All the secrets of Nature were revealed to you there, for whatever I taught to Nature I told you about right away, not so that you could make anything with it, but so that you would know how to judge it well] (3029–34). Indeed, under Wisdom's tutelage, Aristotle becomes so intimately acquainted with Nature, so learned in natural philosophy that he might serve as her proxy in the argument against Grace. Deguileville's entangling of these two figures signals an important departure from the Neoplatonic foundations of the Chartrian *Natura*, revealing just how fully Aristotelian science came to be synonymous with the study of nature in the centuries after Bernard took his inspiration for *Natura* from the Timaeon cosmology. Although Nature retains ties to divinity—she serves Grace, she is Wisdom's pupil—she is now a thoroughly Aristotelian figure, which for Deguileville means that Nature is implicated in the limited quality of even the best of human knowledge.

"RIGHT AS ALEYN"? NATURE IN *THE* *PARLIAMENT OF FOWLS*

A self-consciously intertextual composite, Chaucer's characterization of Nature pretends to be no more than a realization of the *Natura* tradition, one of the poet's many books come to life in dreams.⁷⁸ According to

⁷⁸ See Piero Boitani, "Old Books Brought to Life in Dreams: The *Book of the Duchess*, the *House of Fame*, the *Parliament of Fowls*," in *The Cambridge Chaucer Companion*, ed.

the narrator, Nature is “right as Aleyn, in the Pleynte of Kynde,/ Devyseth [her] of aray and face” (316–17).⁷⁹ The reference establishes the dream’s authority in accord with the Latin tradition and serves as shorthand for further description—the goddess and her trappings are, as it were, simply translated into the new story. But Chaucer’s citation of Alan obscures both the originality of his contribution and his debts to other sources, namely Jean’s *Roman* and the amatory French tradition, which share Alan as a common source but, as we have seen in the case of the *Roman*, accelerate the secularization of Natura. Binding Nature within multiple levels of enclosure, Chaucer continues the trajectory of her secularization; but far from a simple debasement of the once-regal Natura, Chaucer’s earthbound portrait of Nature serves its own ends while reactivating many of the tensions and contradictions latent in the long tradition.

The *Parliament* opens as the narrator falls asleep after reading Macrobius’s commentary on Cicero’s *Somnium Scipionis*, that foundational text of the Chartrian allegories. In a dream he meets Scipio’s own guide, “this forseyd Affrican” (120), who leads—or rather shoves—him through a gate into a garden of earthly love, “an unusual prelude to a *locus amoenus*,” as Alastair Minnis observes.⁸⁰ Indeed, the poem’s unseemly movement from the cosmic and moral Ciceronian frame to the secular and sexual realm of the English poem replicates in brief the whole trajectory of the Natura tradition that I have been describing so far. Natura’s descent from Platonic *arcana* to vernacular bird debates is a thousand-year literary history that Chaucer encapsulates in a matter of several hundred lines.

Even before we meet Nature—who is, as it were, cached within the dense intertextuality of the poem—Chaucer brings Venus, her sometime partner, to the fore. Though she remains speechless, it is Venus who governs this dream, as the narrator, upon the threshold of the garden, invokes “Cytheria,” another name for Venus, his “blisful lady swete,” who

Boitani and Mann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 39–57. Boitani discusses Chaucer’s “bookish” dream-visions as a kind of intertextual “hide and seek,” which begin with a book, refer to books during the action of the poem, and then end with the production of a book (p. 42). “Olde bokes” are transformed into “newe science” when “the poet, both satisfied and dissatisfied with what he has read, produces his own book by connecting his texts, relating them to each other, integrating them with his own images and ideas, by finding in them ‘mater of to wryte’ and supplementing it with his own ‘connyng for t’endite’” (p. 50), citing the *Parliament*, lines 167–8.

⁷⁹ Chaucer also cites Alan’s other great allegory of Nature, the *Anticlaudianus*, in the *House of Fame*: “And than believe y on Marcian,/ And eke on Anticlaudian,/ That sooth was her description/ Of alle the hevenes region,/ As fer as that y sey the preve;/ Therefore y kan hem now beleve” (985–90).

⁸⁰ Minnis, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems*, p. 269.

"madest [him] this sweven for to mete" (113–15).⁸¹ Through the boundary of the gate, he traverses a *locus amoenus* populated by allegorical figures reminiscent of scenes from Boccaccio's *Teseida* and the *Roman de la Rose*. Eventually he finds himself in Venus's own "temple of bras" where he beholds Venus herself "in a privy corner in disporte," lying naked from the waist up, the "remenant" covered by no more than a "subtil kerchief" (260–73). Thus exposed, she figures a striking contrast to Macrobius's famous image of Natura's modesty.

In one sense, Chaucer similarly "unwraps" Natura's traditional garment. In the *Parliament*, as Maureen Quilligan observes, Natura's ekphrastic robe becomes a "three-dimensional" scene, a textual image traditionally read allegorically becomes a literalized text.⁸² Chaucer takes the birds *off of* Natura's iconic robe and arrays them around her as "actual" creatures, as living, speaking characters in their own right rather than purely textual images. In doing so, even as he wraps Nature within a series of frames, setting her, like a jewel, at the center of the garden and of his poem, Chaucer diminishes the integumental aspect of Natura's covering, a trope that Alan had developed from Macrobius's commentary, the very same text that provides the outer wrapping for the *Parliament* itself. For Alan, as for Macrobius, the texture of Natura's integumental gown contained and signified the whole book of nature, uniting all diversities, from the highest to the lowest levels of the cosmos. If Chaucer's Nature is not literally stripped—as Venus nearly is—she is stripped of her *allegorical* referentiality. In the Chartrian tradition, nature could be imagined as a book: things of the world might be interpreted, almost endlessly, as integumental or symbolic coverings for spiritual truths. In the *Parliament*, the book of nature, previously associated with the texture of Nature's dress, has become

⁸¹ The relationship between Cytheria and the Venus who appears within the temple remains a subject of scholarly debate. Economou, for example, denies their identity, defining the latter as "Venus-Luxuria," in contrast to Cytheria, who is "always identified in Chaucer as the goddess of legitimate love, a love that functions in accordance with the love that binds together the entire universe in harmony . . . Recognition of this distinction between Cytherea and the Venus in the temple is absolutely necessary if one is to understand Chaucer's poem." See Economou, *Goddess Natura*, 138–9. Minnis, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer*, gives an overview of the debate over Venus's identity and her relationship to Nature, pp. 283–90. My own view is that Chaucer does not draw firm distinctions between the two aspects of Venus, nor between Venus's and Nature's operations, but maintains, by the structure of the poem, the ambiguity of "legitimate" and "wanton" forms of sexuality, just as the gateway through which Africanus shoves him promises the two "faces" of love.

⁸² Quilligan, "Allegory, Allegoresis, and the De-allegorization of Language: The *Roman de la rose*, the *De planctu naturae*, and the *Parlement of Foules*," in *Allegory, Symbol, and Myth*, ed. Morton W. Bloomfield (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 176.

a book about Nature, specifically, about her governance of sexual propagation.

Although I will argue that the *Parliament* ultimately reinforces the *Roman's* tendency to deflate rather than elevate the metaphysical status of Nature, it is important to note Chaucer's evocation of Nature's work as congruent with the divine will and perhaps even a direct expression of it. Through the boundary of the gate and through the overheated hallways of Venus's temple, the narrator beholds Nature sitting in a clearing, encircled by a host of birds over whose yearly mating ritual she presides. Here the bookish narrator identifies her as "Aleyn's" own goddess. Indeed, Nature's function in the *Parliament* powerfully evokes the Chartrian figure, as further on the narrator describes Nature as "vicaire of the almyghty Lord,/ That hot, cold, hevye, lyght, moyst, and dreye/ Hath knyght by evene noumbres of acord" (379–80). The ambiguity of Chaucer's syntax in these lines obscures the referent of the restrictive clause—who is responsible for this "knitting," Nature or "the almyghty Lord"?—a point worth pausing over since it determines the scope of Nature's cosmic power in relation to God. The Chartrian *Natura* is closely associated with the principles of accord and moderation: in Bernard's *Cosmographia*, for example, she is charged with the crucial task of uniting body and soul "de celestis ordinis emulatione" [through emulation of the order of the heavens] (II.11.1: 4). In binding the body forged by *Physis* with the immortal soul produced by *Urania*, *Natura* imitates the originary act of *Noys*, or *Providence*, the reconciliation of warring oppositions into a harmonious universe. But as we have seen, the Boethian scheme establishes a redundancy in this aspect of the cosmos, so that the binding agents Nature and Love might be seen as facets of God himself, whose original act of binding gives birth to creation.⁸³ Similarly, in the *De planctu*, it is not *Natura* but God who orders and binds the universe: "Deus igitur mundali palatio varias rerum species ascribendo quas, discrepantium generum litigio disparatas, legitimi ordinis congruentia temperavit, leges indidit, sanctionibus alligavit" [Accordingly God assigned various species of things to the palace of the Universe, and these, though separated by the strife between differing classes, He regulated by agreement from law and order; He imposed laws on them, He bound them by sanctions] (8.209–13). Indeed, Alan's description of God's reconciliation of the strife between differing classes of being anticipates the Chaucerian *Parliament* of raucous birds where Nature strives to sustain the order established by God

⁸³ See Boethius, *De consolazione*, III.m.9, 1–2; 18–32: "O...sator...Tu numeris elementa ligas ut frigora flammis/ Arida conueniant liquidis, ne purior ignis/ Euolet aut mersas deducant pondera terras."

(8.209). In his representation of Nature's dominion, Chaucer seems, therefore, quite aware of the traditional delegation of responsibilities, which ascribes originary order to God alone but allows for Natura's secondary participation in maintaining divine order. Personified Nature is thus rightly styled God's "vicaire," that is, God's representative. Like others in the tradition, Chaucer, too, leaves open the possibility that Nature perpetuates the orderly universe established by God and so participates in God's power. In the narrator's first description of Nature, it is difficult to see where God ends and Nature begins. Similarly, in the *Cosmographie*, the theophany comprising Noys, Urania, Natura, and Physis presents overlapping divine functions. But in the tradition of Nature following the *Roman*, Nature becomes more and more closely identified with Physis, reduced to the bodily and the material, and that is finally her place in Chaucer's *Parliament* as well, but in characteristically Chaucerian fashion, not without complication.

In Chaucer's portrait Nature is certainly regal, "a noble empresse, ful of grace" (319). She remains "vicaire of the almyghty Lord" (379) as the Chartrian tradition had first posited.⁸⁴ Also in keeping with the tradition, Chaucer emphasizes the order and harmony (as well as variety) over which Nature presides and to which she gives rise. As George Economou has noted, the beautiful music the narrator hears upon entering the garden—" [o]f instruments of strenges in acord" (197)—echoes the harmony of the nine heavenly spheres that Scipio witnesses and also anticipates the birds' singing at the end of the poem when they have chosen their mates: "And whan this werk al brought was to an ende,/ To every foul Nature yaf his make/ By evene acord" (666–8).⁸⁵ Africanus's praise of "commune profyt" (47, 75) as man's noblest goal reiterates the value of unity in multiplicity and links Chaucer's poetic frame to the content of the dream itself as Nature acts as the bond that unites disparate entities. From the loving "acord" of bodies and wills issues a fruitful harmony, at least for the lower birds, giving rise to the "ravyshyng swetnesse" of birdsong and the continuance of their species (198).

The *Somnium Scipionis* and Alan's "Pleynte of Kynde" are the only two texts mentioned by name in the *Parliament*, but the work allusively gestures toward a number of additional sources that give shape to the narrator's vision of the garden and its inhabitants.⁸⁶ Although the narrator

⁸⁴ Although my discussion above demonstrates how the *Roman* works to undermine Nature's stature, Jean also reiterates Natura's traditional title as God's "vicar" at lines 16752 and 19477.

⁸⁵ See Economou, *Goddess Natura*, p. 133.

⁸⁶ On Chaucer's sources for the *Parliament*, see B.A. Windeatt, *Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1982), pp. 73–124, and Helen Phillips

recognizes Alan's goddess when he beholds Nature in the garden of his dream, her status in the *Parliament* owes at least as much to Jean de Meun and the French allegorical tradition that followed the *Roman's* lead in secularizing and particularizing Nature's jurisdiction.⁸⁷ Nature's garden ultimately reflects the heavens of which it is a microcosm, but in the interim it is characterized by strife, the discord among its inhabitants revolving around an imbalance: there is but one prized formel and too many suitors. As the lower-ranking birds complain, the noble birds' impasse hinders the operation of natural enjoyment and its product, the reproduction of species. Even if we understand the birds as human surrogates and Nature's garden as a metonym for her whole domain, in Chaucer's contribution to the long tradition she remains limited in relation to her prior jurisdiction. The influence of the *Roman* is strong here, where Nature presides over a system in which pursuit of pleasure stimulates procreative activity, blurring her distinction from Venus and tying her ever more firmly, even if in suggestion only, to animal instinct rather than to higher and distinctively human capacities.

More broadly, Chaucer's presentation of Nature as instigator and regulator of sexual behavior is thus consistent with the conflicted portrait of Nature in the *Roman*. As in the *Roman*, Nature's domain in the *Parliament* is restricted to the realm of love and reproduction, a discussion that aptly takes place within a fertile garden overflowing with life, no doubt the result of the generative activity Nature urges. While the narrator recognizes Nature's traditional role as God's deputy, her purview is diminished in the *Parliament* by a sort of imprisonment in the walled garden. Though filled with every variety of tree and bird, rabbits, harts and hinds, a river brimming with fish, as well as traditional personifications of the allegory of love and an array of classical gods and mythical figures renowned for their amatory adventures, Nature's garden is closed off from the heavens. Within the dream proper, there is no mention of the cosmos beyond the bounds of the earth. Venus is among the classical figures that adorn the garden, but the faculty of reason appears only in absence. Nature admits this herself when she advises the formel: "If I were Resoun . . .," distinguishing herself from Reason even as she speaks for

and Nick Havely, eds, *Chaucer's Dream Poetry* (London and New York: Longman, 1997), pp. 219–74.

⁸⁷ The *Parliament* is indebted, for example, to the French genre of the love debate, in particular those that feature avian assemblies as part of their judicial resolution. See Windcatt, *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, pp. 85–124. On the particular suitability of birds as speakers, see Mann's "Chaucerian Birds," chapter 5 of her study of beast literature, *From Aesop to Reynard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 192–219.

Reason *in absentia*.⁸⁸ As in the *Roman*, the alliance between Nature and Reason in the earlier tradition wanes in favor of an association of Nature and Venus.

Yet in the context of such skeptical circumscription of Nature's ambit, what is the significance of the apparently incongruous cosmic frame? In many respects, the frame produces the same ambiguity as other Chaucerian disavowals, such as Troilus's similarly imagined glimpse of this "litel spot of erthe" (1815) or the poet's Retractions. As we have seen, Africanus emphasizes the insignificance of the "lytel erthe" with respect to the "galaxye" and the vanity of all human behavior not directed toward attaining heaven: "our present worldes lyves space/ Nis but a maner deth" (53–7). According to Africanus, every person must sacrifice personal satisfaction, or narrow self-interest, to serve the "commune profyt," a goal made clearer when human beings, like Troilus, consider their smallness against the immensity of the universe. Africanus accordingly warns Scipio to avoid worthless earthly pleasures that interfere with the pursuit of "hevene blisse" (72): "he ne shulde hym in the world delyte" (66). In this regard, the frame strains against the dream of Nature that follows, set in its garden of earthly love, filled with figures representing the playful negotiations that characterize human sexuality as well as its ignoble and sometimes devastating effects. Although the music of the spheres permeates the world below, Scipio's vision of heaven remains a contrast to the earthly content of the narrator's dream. As the poem moves from the lofty vantage offered by Cicero to focus on the inhabitants of this "lytel erthe," so too the abundance and wide reach of Nature's realm shrinks to a mere sliver of God's vast creation. In her setting among the birds, Nature's jurisdiction seems reduced to just one aspect of her robe in the *De planctu*, that portion depicting the birds of the air. It might be argued that Chaucer limits Nature's reach as a strategy for focusing his poetic subject: after all, when the avian matchmaking on Valentine's Day is finished, Nature has the rest of the year to tend the other realms in her jurisdiction. I suggest, however, that the limitations Chaucer imposes on Nature are deliberate.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ But see Economou, *Goddess Natura*, who disagrees that Nature herself lacks reason and does not think that Nature should be understood as limited to the sublunary world in Chaucer's poem: "the view of her given by Chaucer's narrator as *pronuba* and *procreatrix* presiding over the mating of birds on Saint Valentine's Day should not restrict one's comprehension of her kingdom. The celestial harmony that Scipio heard in his dream is also in her kingdom" (p. 149).

⁸⁹ Lisa J. Kiser, "Chaucer and the Politics of Nature," in *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, ed. Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2001), pp. 31–56, argues that the *Parliament* discloses Chaucer's awareness of the social construction of theories of nature, ultimately limiting Natura herself in ways similar to those I have described: "As with the

Not only does his treatment of Nature correspond to her broader secularization in the vernacular tradition, but Chaucer's inclusion of the Ciceronian frame *makes an issue* of what this "litel erthe" means, rather than just letting readers enjoy it. In his way, Chaucer wrestles with the Augustinian question of the spiritual and moral value of *visibilia* and *naturalia*, a question unnecessary in a purely secular context, of which there are many examples by this period. By attaching the Ciceronian frame, Chaucer allows the question to remain in play, asking, even as Will does from his lofty vantage upon the mountain of Myddelerþe in B.11, what is the meaning of this sublunary life? Is it only so much bird chatter? Ought human beings to laugh at the larger insignificance of their mortal strivings, as Troilus seems to do?

But Chaucer's implied question also cuts the other direction: with so much life to engage us here, who has time for a celestial journey or, as Minnis puts it, the "intellectual elitism of Cicero's text"?⁹⁰ Although questions about the value of this "litel erthe" are a perennial Chaucerian concern, my argument about Chaucer's handling of Nature finally rests on this latter interpretation of the frame's effect. Nature's significance does not reside in the cosmos, Chaucer seems to say, or not only there: nature is the process of the mortal life, that life "which we share with the animals," to borrow a phrase from J.M. Coetzee.⁹¹ This is not to allege that Chaucer dismisses Africanus's celebration of "commune profyt" or denies a relationship between Nature's mundane workings and the larger celestial order. Though they reach their conclusions in strikingly different ways, for Chaucer, as for Langland, the pursuit of salvific "commune profyt" crucially takes place *within* the bounds of this "litel erthe." To put it another way: by the mid-fourteenth century both Chaucer and Langland inherit a tradition of personified Nature that by and large consigns the goddess to the physical realm. "Unallegorical Chaucer," as Quilligan dubs him,⁹² the poet of the social and tangible world, embraces the earthly goddess that tradition bequeaths him. If Nature's attentions are now focused on "[o]ur present worldes lyves space," so too are the poet's, and all the better that she might serve as a means to explain the tendencies at war within the human subjects of his art.

female eagle, Chaucer's Lady Nature seems to exhibit substantial control and power over her sphere of existence, but on closer analysis, that sphere reveals itself to be organized around class- and gender-based ideologies much larger than can be affected by her individual will" (p. 46).

⁹⁰ Minnis, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems*, p. 268. Compare the narrator's more explicit and differently motivated refusal of the cosmos in *House of Fame*.

⁹¹ Coetzee, *Disgrace* (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 74.

⁹² Quilligan, "Deallegorization of Language," p. 164.

Langland's contemporary Chaucer knew Alan's two great allegories of Natura. In addition, he translated the *Roman* and followed its lead in focusing on Nature's association with sexuality—and disassociation from Reason—in the *Parliament*, where she appears as arbiter of an avian mating ritual. As the many vernacular responses to Jean's Nature attest, the *Roman* crystallized a longstanding debate about the moral and spiritual value of nature.⁹³ To break with the tradition of Nature that had gradually jettisoned its divine associations and literalized its cosmic significance, Langland redirects the trajectory of secularization by recuperating the moral and spiritual value attached to nature in the Chartrian allegories. The next chapter explores how Langland reimagines the relationship between nature and divinity in the figure Kynde, elevating nature to an extent that surpasses even his Neoplatonic models and, at the same time, brings God down into the very center of human experience.

⁹³ See White's discussion of some fourteenth-century French responses to the *Roman* in *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*, 139–73. The *Roman* also sparked a famous literary debate in the fifteenth century often referred to as the Querelle. Texts of the Querelle are contained in the following editions: *Le Débat sur le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Eric Hicks (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1996) and *La Querelle de la Rose: Letters and Documents*, trans. Joseph L. Baird and John R. Kane (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1978). See also David Hult, "The *Roman de la Rose*, Christine de Pizan, and the *querelles des femmes*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 184–94; Kevin Brownlee, "Discourses of the Self: Christine de Pizan and the *Romance of the Rose*," in *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose: Text, Image, Reception*, ed. Brownlee and Sylvia Huot (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), pp. 234–61; and Jillian M.L. Hill, *The Medieval Debate on Jean de Meung's Roman de la Rose* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992). On Langland's response to the *Roman*, see Davis, "Piers Plowman and the Querelle."

2

“Fader and formour”

Langland’s Creator Kynde

For he was synguler hymself seide *Faciamus*—

Piers Plowman B.9.35

Myne þei ben and of me—

Piers Plowman B.18.330

At first glance, the goddess Natura and Langland’s Kynde might seem to have little in common aside from their shared reference to nature. Natura is female, her name Latinate; Kynde is male, and his name derives from an insular Middle English word. Indeed, in addition to gender and name, some differences are more profound, most importantly the fact that Natura is God’s deputy while Kynde, as Wit has it, is a name for God himself, the “[f]ader and formour of al þat euere was maked” (B.9.27). Yet despite their obvious distinctions, in this chapter I argue that a closer appraisal of divine creativity in *Piers Plowman* reveals the persistence of Natura’s traditional functions, now recuperated as properties of the triune God. In the vernacular tradition, as we have seen, Natura is increasingly confined to an earthly realm, mired in procreative duties, divorced from her former companion Reason, and sometimes implicated in human carnality and moral failure. As an alternative Natura—renamed, regendered, and redeified—Kynde breaks with Natura’s diminished status while salvaging the early tradition’s confidence in nature’s moral goodness and mediatory potential.

In Kynde and in the poem’s related meditations on divine creativity, the female theophanies of the Natura tradition are recast as properties of what Langland’s Samaritan calls a “ful God,” a God who makes, becomes manifest in, and loves the world through his triune capacity. Barbara Newman has described Natura and her sister theophanies as inventions devised to fulfill “a need that almost inevitably emerges in monotheistic systems . . . a yearning for mediation with the Almighty.”¹ Medieval

¹ Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, p. 322.

Christianity indeed instituted numerous official forms of mediation: the intercessions of the Virgin Mother and the saints, the sacraments and the Church, the Holy Spirit, and, most important of all, Christ, the Son incarnate. Allegorical goddesses, Newman argues, were another response to the problem of monotheism: "Because human trust is more easily placed in goods and persons closer to home than in the transcendent, immutable One, a heaven and earth swept clean of rival deities tend to be quickly repopulated with angels, saints, and other mediating spirits."² This chapter argues that in *Piers Plowman*, Kynde, too, does this work of bringing the divine "closer to home." But even as Kynde gestures back to earlier personifications of nature—a reminder of the Natura tradition and its usefulness—Langland's figure *reinternalizes* the properties that the Natura tradition had externalized and distributed among a series of female theophanies.

This chapter begins by examining Langland's depiction of the physicality of God's dealings with his creation, a representation of divine involvement that contrasts with the remote ordainer of the Natura tradition—in *Piers Plowman*, there is no interloping secondary cause of creation, no mediatory goddesses, but only God himself. And yet, as in the Natura tradition, mediation is paramount. God's triune multidimensionality is shown to be at the heart of his generativity. In *Piers Plowman*, God creates through the Trinitarian persons, and especially through the work of the Son who, as "mene," acts as a mediator between creator and creation. Christ's mediation is vital to Langland's depiction of God in the guise of Kynde, and I will argue that Christ assumes Natura's traditional role as plaintive advocate for humankind. Finally, I examine Langland's representation of Kynde as the generative source and binding principle of cosmic order, two further attributes the figure shares with Natura: in *Piers Plowman*, God's love is the sign of a fundamental and overflowing plenitude that promotes balance even as it "multipliþ þe erþe" (B.16.211). To explore these paired functions, I look to the poem's association of God with the *kynde* realms of sexuality and death, two additional aspects of creaturely life into which Langland infuses the divine and, in doing so, revises the separation of duties depicted by the Natura tradition.

HANDLING CREATION

In contrast to the distant originator of the Natura tradition, the godhead shrouded in majesty, Langland's God materializes as an involved creator.

² Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, p. 38.

Langland shapes his vision of divine proximity by portraying God as directly and instrumentally responsible for created nature.³ In the *Natura* tradition and related rational and scientific interpretations of creation, Nature, either personified or conceived as a set of forces, acts as God's deputy, operating not independently but according to the fixed laws of the universe established by God at the very beginning of time. As I argued in Chapter 1, this view allows human beings to pursue meaning in the observation of created things, such as the movement of the stars, the behavior of animals, and the properties of light, for example, since these aspects of created nature are ordained and made orderly by God and are, therefore, intelligible to human reason. Installing the intermediary figure Nature sets natural processes and phenomena at a remove from God and shifts them out of the sacred realm so that, no longer viewed as a divine mystery, the world of nature becomes a subject fit for human inquiry. Furthermore, if the laws of nature are understood to be ordained by God, human observers may have confidence not only in their ability to discern these laws, but also that such observations will lead to a deeper level of truth.

In *Piers Plowman*, Langland elevates nature by revealing how God lowers himself to earth. Rather than postulating Nature as an interloping secondary cause, which has the effect of distancing creation from God, Langland insists that God creates "wipouten any mene" (B.9.34). In Wit's introduction of Kynde as "[f]ader and formour," Langland's God becomes the direct cause of creation, a maker who shapes human beings by a physical act of "werkmanshipe" (B.9.45). Wit describes the process by which God made the human body: "Of erpe and eyr it is maad, medled togideres,/ Wip wynd and wip water wittily enioyned" (B.9.3–4). This picture of Kynde's combination of the elements to produce the human body recalls the creation of humankind in the Chartrian tradition—and, further back, in the Timaeon vision of creation—that I discussed in Chapter 1. As a microcosm, the human body corresponds with the greater universe: both are made of warring elements "medled togideres" in perfect balance and joined to an animating spirit, so that the human being is part mundane and part divine. In the *Cosmographia* it is Physis, *Natura*'s earthly sister and counterpart, who must coax the elements into human form, and she takes the elemental harmony of the universe for her model

³ Davlin explores the dynamic position of God in relation to humankind in *Place of God*, pp. 28–63, observing that Langland locates God within the human community as well as within the individual human body. The first chapter of her study is especially helpful in its exploration of the ways in which God traverses the boundaries between heaven and earth, thereby suffusing creation with his presence.

in this task. In the *De planctu* Alan similarly stresses the binding of opposites that Plato describes in the creation myth of the *Timaeus*. The poet praises Natura's creative activities:

O dei proles genitrixque rerum,
 Vinculum mundi stabilisque nexus,
 . . .
 Que, tuis mundum moderans habenis,
 Cuncta concordi stabilita nodo
 Nectis et pacis glutino maritas
 Celica terris.
 Que, Noys puras recolens ideas,
 Singulas rerum species monetas,
 Rem togans forma clamidemque forme
 Pollice formans. (7: 1–2, 9–16)

[O child of God, mother of creation, bond of the universe and its stable link . . . you who, who by your reins guide the universe, unite all things in a stable and harmonious bond and wed heaven to earth in a union of peace; who, working on the pure ideas of Noys, mold the species of all created things, clothing matter with form and fashioning a mantle of form with your thumb.]

In keeping with the Timaeian tradition, Natura calls her creation of man a microcosm of the universe itself: just as the four elements bring unity to the whole structure of the cosmos, so too these elements bind together “edificium corporis humani” [the house of the human body] (6: 50).⁴

Similarly imagining the human body as an “edificium” in *Piers Plowman*, Wit describes the “castel” of *Caro* as a structure built by Kynde—clearly here not the goddess Natura, nor her sister Physis, but God the “fader” and “creatour” himself (B.9.2, 26–7). Even Plato's Artífex employs subordinate deities in producing man's body so as to ensure its mortality, since the Artífex creates only eternal things. But in Langland's vision of creation, God himself in the guise of Kynde carefully forges the human body out of the elements. Wit insists on God's creative independence: Kynde “made man [moost lik]to hymself one/ And Eue of his ryb bon *wipouten any mene*” (B.9.33–4, emphasis mine). In other words, as Lady Philosophy also observes in Boethius's *De consolacione Philosophiae*, God creates the universe and its populating entities entirely of his own accord, uncompelled and unassisted by “externae . . . causae” [external causes]:

O . . . sator . . . qui tempus ab aevo
 ire iubes stabilisque manens das cuncta moueri,
 quem non externae pepulerunt fingere causae

⁴ I discuss this passage in the context of the *Cosmographia* in Chapter 1.

materiae fluitantis opus uerum insita summi
forma boni liuore carens. (III.m.9: 1–9)

[O thow Fadir . . . thow that duellest thiselwe ay stedefast and stable, and yevest alle othere thynges to ben meved, ne foreyne causes necesseden the nevere to compounwe werk of floterunge matere, but oonly the forme of sovereyn good iset within the withoute envye, that moevede the frely.]⁵

That God is called Kynde in *Piers Plowman* signals the profound change Langland makes in assigning to God the activities traditionally given over to Natura in literary and philosophical accounts of creation. While the name Kynde recalls these traditions, activating them for us as it would have for many of Langland's first readers,⁶ Langland uses the vernacular term for nature in an unexpected way. Kynde alludes to the Chartrian myth, but reinstates the creator-God of Genesis, and especially of the second version of Adam's creation, in which God shapes the first man out of clay using his own hands.

Indeed, the representation of the events of Genesis in late-medieval visual culture, heavily influenced by the Incarnational focus and affective trend of lay piety, suggests an evocative context for Langland's presentation of Kynde as an artisan, familiarly and physically involved with his creation. Davlin cites Holy Church's description of creation in the poem's opening passus as an analogue of God's proximity to his creation in medieval art. In B.1, Holy Church tells the narrator that God, here called Truth rather than Kynde, "formed yow alle/ Boþe wiþ fel and wiþ face" (B.1.14–15). This image, Davlin notes, "implies immediacy of touch and plastic molding of 'fel and . . . face,' a physical intimacy shown in countless manuscript illuminations of the Book of Genesis, in stained glass windows, and in picture book illustrations of the creation."⁷ I would add to Davlin's observation that these medieval visual representations might equally aid our understanding of God as Kynde: the depiction of the Creator found in many medieval representations of Genesis, including illuminated manuscripts contemporary with *Piers Plowman*, suggests a context for Langland's emphasis on God's creative activity and intimate involvement with his creation that is worth considering more closely.

In her study, Davlin specifically cites the extraordinary illustration of the creation of Adam and Eve in the Holkham Bible Picture Book (London, British Library, Add. 47682; Fig. 2.1).⁸ The Holkham Bible, written in

⁵ Chaucer, *Boece*, book 3, meter 9, lines 1–11.

⁶ On the continued literary influence of the Chartrian allegories, see Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry*; Economou, *Goddess Natura*; and Simpson, *Sciences and the Self*.

⁷ Davlin, *Place of God*, p. 43.

⁸ W.O. Hassall, *Holkham Bible Picture Book* (London: Dropmore Press, 1954).

Anglo-Norman and named for its provenance at Holkham Hall in Norfolk, was commissioned by a Dominican friar c. 1320–30 for the edification of wealthy lay audiences.⁹ Here the Creator stretches his hands over Adam's naked and as yet inanimate body, appearing to stroke the figure upon the forearm and stomach. Below this scene, the Creator uses the same prominent hands to pull Eve from the opening in Adam's side. As above, the fingers of the right hand are splayed apart, exaggerating its appearance as if to suggest the physical effort involved in the creative act.

Another production known as the Queen Mary's Psalter (London, British Library, Royal 2. B. VII), written in Anglo-Norman c. 1310–20, similarly depicts the Creator bending over toward a reclining male figure (Fig. 2.2). Here the Creator grasps Adam's right hand and raises his own right hand with two fingers extended. The next image shows Adam asleep as the Creator, again using only one hand, pulls Eve from Adam's side, taking her by the wrist, while stretching out his other hand, palm pointing up, as if to direct life-giving breath into the newborn Eve's mouth. In the lower compartment of Fig. 2.2, the Creator leads Adam by the hand, with Eve following close behind, as he points to the Tree of Knowledge. While the Creator's demeanor here is more reserved than that of the Creator in the Holkham Bible, the Queen Mary's Psalter likewise presents God on intimate terms with Adam and Eve, inclining his body toward them in each act of creation and physically touching his newly made creatures with an outstretched hand.

These depictions of a familiar Creator have a long history. In the ninth-century Moutier-Grandval Bible (London, British Library, Add. 10546), produced in Tours c. 834–43, the Creator uses his hands to shape Adam and Eve from a bed of clay (Fig. 2.3). A mosaic in a thirteenth-century dome in San Marco, Venice, which was based on illuminations found in the Cotton Genesis manuscript (London, British Library, Cotton Otho B. vi.), similarly depicts the seated Creator using his hands to shape a dark earthy figure into a man (Fig. 2.4).¹⁰ In a subsequent scene, the Creator endows Adam, now fully formed, with a small winged human figure representing the soul.

⁹ See F.P. Pickering, ed., *The Anglo-Norman Text of the Holkham Bible Picture Book*, Anglo-Norman Text Society 23 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

¹⁰ See Dorothy Glass, "In Principio: The Creation in the Middle Ages," in *Approaches to Nature*, ed. Lawrence D. Roberts (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1982), pp. 67–104. On the relationship of the mosaic to the Cotton Genesis manuscript, see Kurt Weitzmann, "The Mosaics of San Marco and the Cotton Genesis," *Venezia e l'Europa: Atti del XVIII Congresso Internazionale di Storia dell'Arte, Venezia, 12–18 settembre 1955* (Venice: Arte veneta, 1956), pp. 152–3. Penny Howell Jolly gives a comprehensive reading of the mosaic in *Made in God's Image? Eve and Adam in the Genesis Mosaics at San Marco, Venice* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

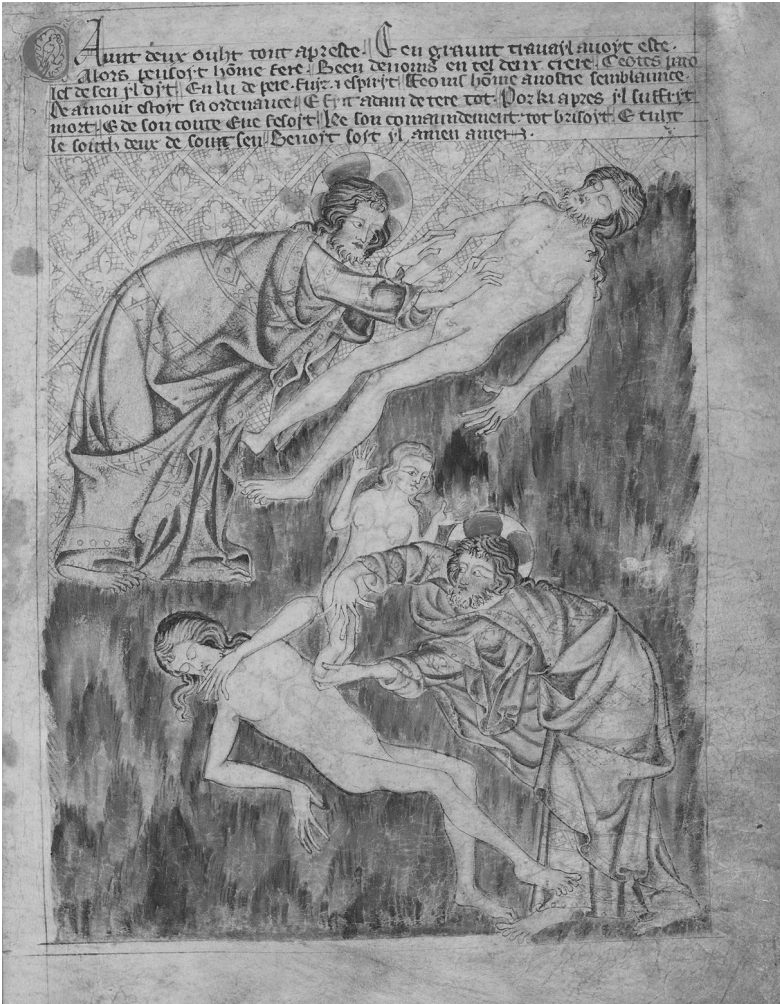


Fig. 2.1 Creation of Adam and Eve

London, British Library, Add. 47682, fol. 3r. By permission of the British Library.

In an insular manuscript also of the thirteenth century, the Latin Oscott Psalter (London, British Library, Add. 50000), creation scenes accompany a depiction of the Three Magi who visit the Christ Child (Fig. 2.5). On the left side, the Creator tenderly cradles the sleeping Adam in his arms, protectively draping his own cloak around Adam's small, naked figure in a manner that mirrors the depiction of Mary holding the infant Christ, also

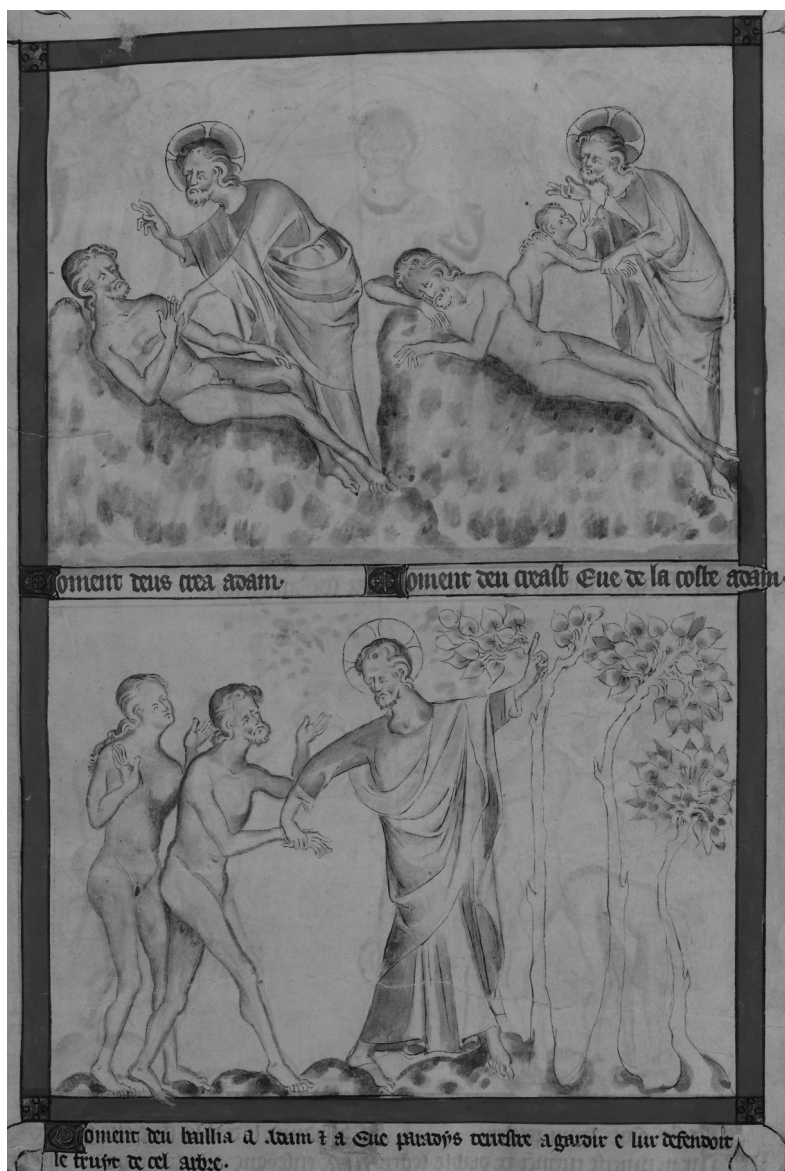


Fig. 2.2 Creation of Adam and Eve

London, British Library, Royal 2. B. VII, fol. 3r. By permission of the British Library.

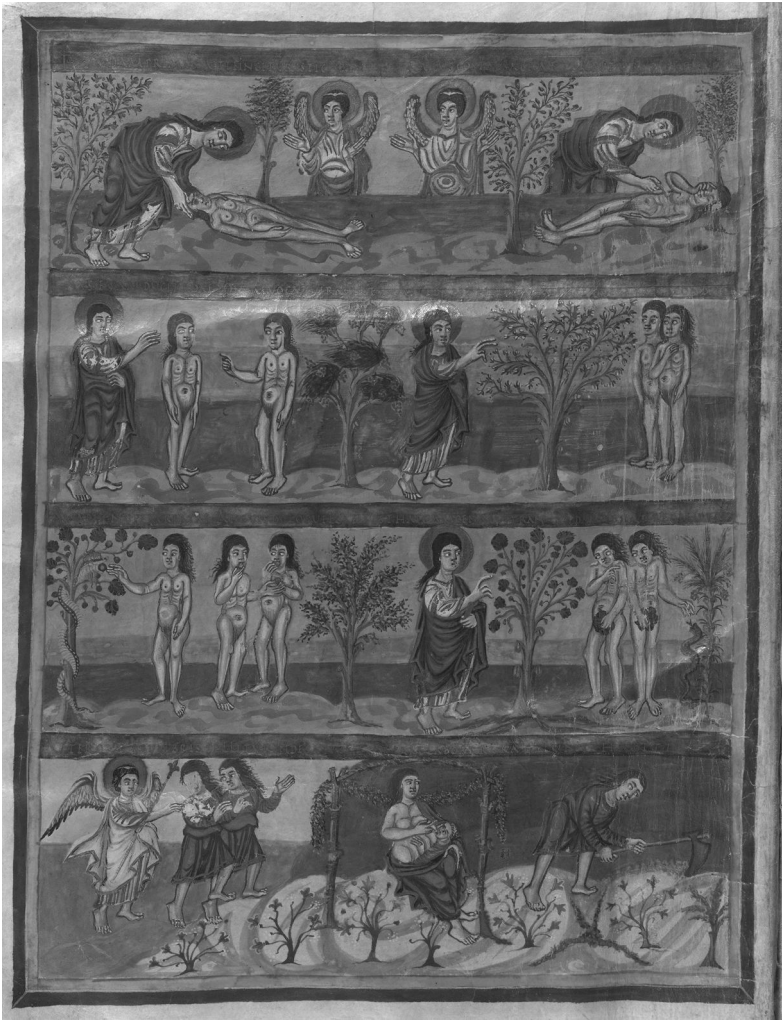


Fig. 2.3 Adam and Eve

London, British Library, Add. 10546, fol. 5v. By permission of the British Library.

enfolded in her cloak, in the upper corner of the illustration. On the right side, the Creator holds Eve by the wrist as he pulls her from Adam's flank.

Visual depictions of a familiar and tangible Creator are thus widespread geographically and chronologically, though this characterization was by no means inevitable. In other medieval representations of the Creation the Creator is not shown to make physical contact with Adam and Eve, but



Fig. 2.4 Creation of Adam

Church of San Marco, Venice (mosaic ceiling). By permission of the Procurator of San Marco.

rather stands apart from them, usually standing erect or hovering above them, in contrast to the inclining postures of the more intimate depictions of the Creator that I have discussed above. Most commonly in alternative representations, as in an example from a late-thirteenth century French Bible (New York, Morgan Library, M. 494), the Creator raises one or both hands to call forth Adam and Eve into creation but remains physically separate from them (Fig. 2.6).

In books such as the Queen Mary's Psalter and the Holkham Bible Picture Book, the iconographic significance of God's hands touching and often shaping the bodies of Adam and Eve is made explicit in contrast to immediately preceding illustrations of the fifth day of Genesis, in which God creates the animals. In both the Psalter and the Holkham Bible, the Creator sits surrounded by the sum of his creation thus far, encircled by every kind of beast of air, sea, and land. These illustrations, especially the colorful Holkham scene (Fig. 2.7), are strikingly beautiful in their variety and plenitude, calling to mind, in fact, Natura's lavishly adorned robe depicting creation in Alan's *De planctu*.



Fig. 2.5 The Three Magi and Creation of Adam and Eve

London, British Library, Add. 50000, fol. 9v. By permission of the British Library.



Fig. 2.6 Creation of Eve

New York, Morgan Library, M. 494, fol. 1r. By permission of the Pierpont Morgan Library.

But the creation of the animals is not represented in these manuscripts as artful labor or any sort of physical action requiring special care on God's part. The adjacent pages depicting the sixth day of creation, however, proclaim by contrast the exceptionality of Adam and Eve's creation.

In a similar fashion, Wit draws a distinction between God's creation of the animals and of humankind. Following his initial description of the figurative castle of man's body, which shelters Kynde's "lemman" *Anima* (B.9.6), Wit elaborates by explaining that God's creation of man is fundamentally different from that of the animals because man additionally bears a soul made in the image of God. While God's word alone produces the animals, man is made by God's word *and* work; that is, by his might as well as his speech:

And in þis manere was man maad þoruȝ myȝt of God almyȝty,
 Wiþ his word and werkmanshiþe and wiþ lif to laste.
 And þus God gaf hym a goost, of þe godhede of heuene,
 And of his grete grace graunted hym blisse—
 And þat is lif þat ay shal laste to al his lynage after.
 And þat is þe castel that Kynde made, *Caro* it hatte,
 And is as muche to mene as 'man wiþ a soule.'
 And þat he wroȝte wiþ werk and wiþ word boþe:
 Thorgh myȝt of þe mageste man was ymakid. (B.9.44–52)



Fig. 2.7 Creation of the Animals

London, British Library, Add. 47682, fol. 2v. By permission of the British Library.

Insisting upon God's active "werkmanshipe," this scene of creation presents God not as a remote ordainer of things, delegating the mundane labor of physical creation to Natura, or Physis, or other natural forces that operate in his name, but as an involved "formour," a craftsman who "wroȝte" and "maad" humankind through a process of tangible, though still mysterious, "werk." Indeed, with an image I discussed in this book's

Introduction and will return to below, the Samaritan compares the triune God to a creative hand, an analogy that further elaborates Langland's vision of God's nearness to his creation. It is possible that the Holkham Bible or a book like it, which depicts God using his hands in the creation of Adam and Eve, may have prompted Langland's conception of Kynde's activities and the Samaritan's analogy. Images such as those I have described above, often found in illuminated psalters as well as Bibles, may have been on Langland's mind as he composed his vision of a Creator-God who intimately shapes human beings after his own image, provides for human sustenance, and later intervenes in human history once more in tangible form as Christ incarnate, again moving familiarly among humankind.

WIT'S "LETTRES" AND TRINITARIAN EXPRESSION

Yet to state simply that Langland's God creates without intermediary, following Wit's declaration that God creates "wipouten any mene," obscures the relationship between Langland's complex Trinitarian theology and the poem's vision of divine creativity (B.9.34). Although Wit places God the Father in the role of Natura by naming him Kynde, the other two persons of the Trinity do serve as intermediaries of a sort, in the way that the feminine theophanies had done in the Chartrian allegories. For as the Samaritan's lesson teaches Will, Langland's God is a "ful God," comprising the Son and Holy Spirit as well as the Father (B.17.168). Indeed, it is this very "fullness" that both motivates and facilitates divine creativity: God's Trinitarian nature makes it possible for him to reach down to earth and suffuse creation as Kynde.

The remainder of this chapter considers Langland's representation of divine creativity in Kynde against a series of Trinitarian analogies that elaborates God's powers of generation in the poem. Each of these analogies recalls Neoplatonic notions of divine emanation that play such a crucial role in the Chartrian tradition. I begin here with Wit's analogy of a lord who wishes to "make lettres" (B.9.38), and in subsequent sections I will consider Abraham's analogy of the three qualities belonging to lordship (B.16.191–201); the Samaritan's analogies of a hand and a taper (B.17.136–294); and finally, Abraham's comparison of the three Trinitarian persons to the three grades of chastity (B.16.202–24). In each of these instances Langland illustrates the multidimensional quality of

God's creativity; but more important for our understanding of Kynde, as my discussion of the Samaritan's analogy of the hand in this book's Introduction already begins to suggest, Langland's Trinitarian analogies express divine mysteries in familiar, tangible terms and so reveal the operation of God within the human world, suffusing the earthly with the divine.

Immediately following Wit's description of Kynde's creation of the human body and installation of its soul, a representation that recalls the "hands-on" account of creation in Genesis, Langland amplifies the physicality of Wit's terms by comparing God to a lord who "make[s] lettres" (B.9.38). This textual metaphor suggests that God's creation of human beings—a compound work of body and soul—is like the inscription of words onto parchment, an image that evokes the trope of the book of nature and its underlying exemplarist vision of creation as the material expression of divine ideas. Wit's analogy, moreover, suggests the intent to communicate: a lord writes letters to express some desire, to convey some information, to prompt some action. Just so, Wit suggests, God creates humankind to make his will known.

The Middle English term "lettre" refers not only to informal, private epistles, but also to a range of official, legal documents that endow Wit's analogy with a particular spiritual urgency.¹¹ In a study of literary appropriations of documentary culture in medieval England, Emily Steiner argues that Langland presents a "textual reconstruction of salvation history" in the proliferation of documents in *Piers Plowman*.¹² The fictive legal documents that figure prominently throughout the poem—notably Meed's charter, which consigns sinners to eternal damnation, and Truth's pardon, which rewrites the sentence of Meed's charter in granting heaven to those who "do well"—constitute an "archive of salvation" that records the "incursion of the divine into the human condition."¹³ Steiner does not discuss Wit's analogy because she focuses on documents as cultural artifacts with fixed, recognizable forms, but Wit's imagined "lettres" also demonstrate how the terms and tropes of documentary culture give an account of salvation in *Piers Plowman*. The act of composing a written document, an activity that is both intellectual and physical, involves a transfer of the words in the writer's mind onto a piece of skin. With this rich image, which quite literally presents the word made flesh, Langland

¹¹ *MED*, s.v. "lettre," n. 2. The rich variety of official and legal meanings is elaborated under sense 2b.

¹² Emily Steiner, *Documentary Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 98.

¹³ Steiner, *Documentary Culture*, pp. 93–4, 115. See also Jill Averil Keen, *The Charters of Christ and Piers Plowman: Documenting Salvation* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

invokes both the creation of humankind as well as a more specific embodiment, the Incarnation of God's Word as Christ, divinity pressed into human flesh. Langland gives such an account of the Incarnation in the next passus when the Samaritan, a type of Christ, rides upon a horse called *Caro*—"of mankynde I took it," he says (B.17.108)—and later when Jesus himself jousts "in Piers armes,/ In his helm and in his haubergeon, *humana natura*" (B.18.22–3). The salvific documents that Steiner describes imagine "the immanence of the divine in the human condition."¹⁴ Likewise, in Wit's analogy, the letter figures divine presence in nature both as the *imago dei* contained within each human being, a body with a soul, "hym moost like of marc and of shahte" (B.9.31), and as God made man in the person of Christ, the creator's quite literal investment in his creation.

Through these incarnational associations, the image of the lord writing a letter introduces the concept of the Trinity, for, Wit explains, God did not create man with his "synguler" might (B.9.35) but through a cooperative effort. The involvement of the three divine persons, indicated by the plural "*Faciamus*" (B.9.35, 41a), distinguishes the creation of man from that of the lower animals and involves God more deeply and instrumentally in that creation. Moreover, to properly understand Wit's analogy, we have to apprehend it as a counterfactual or a canceled analogy, in keeping with Langland's documentary language. For Wit's analogy is a negative example of a lord who ultimately *cannot* write a letter; Wit's point is that the triune God possesses certain attributes that enable him to succeed where the lord of his analogy would fail. Specifically, Wit proposes that if a lord desired to "make lettres" and knew how to write, but yet lacked the instrumental "penne" as well as a receptive piece of "parchemyn" upon which to etch his words, "The lettre, for al þe lordshipe . . . were neuere ymaked" (B.9.38–40). The lord, like God, wields the might of his "lordshipe," but in order to manifest his will, according to the logic of this analogy, the lord must also possess an external means of expression.

This complicated passage—a hypothetical that negates the event of creation while simultaneously projecting it—is made even thornier by its manuscript variants, as the Kane-Donaldson apparatus reveals. In negotiating the possibilities for interpretation, I propose a reading that is consistent with the larger concern of Wit's speech in describing God's expressive, that is, trinitarian, creativity. Kane and Donaldson give the lines as follows: "Right as a lord sholde make letters; [if] hym lakked parchemyn,/ Thou3 he [wiste to] write neuer so wel, [and] he hadde [a]

¹⁴ Steiner, *Documentary Culture*, p. 11.

penne,/ The letter, for al þe lordshipe, I leue, were neuere ymaked" (B.9.39–41). My own reading agrees with these emended lines for the most part; however, Kane and Donaldson propose that the lord lacks parchment but does have a pen. This reading certainly makes sense: a lord could no more easily write a letter having a pen and no paper than he might if he lacked both pen and paper. Schmidt's edition offers another reading, describing the converse possibility: here the lord who wishes to make letters is imagined to have parchment ("and hym [ne] lakked parchemyn") but now lacks a pen ("he [wel]de no penne"), and thus we find the hypothetical lord in a situation that precisely reverses the scenario presented by Kane-Donaldson (B.9.38–9). Schmidt argues that the significance of "*Faciamus*" (B.9.35, 41a) is not the Creator's triune nature, conveyed by the form of the first-person plural "Let *us* make," but rather the action described by the verb itself, "to make."¹⁵ Schmidt then argues that "the purpose of the 'writing' analogy is that in addition to the 'slime of the earth' (= *parchemyn* in the metaphor) and his knowledge (*wit*), God required in 'forming, breathing, building' the active exertion of his power, regarded as it were instrumentally (*penne*), because man, unlike the animals has an immortal rational soul made in God's image."¹⁶ While the foregoing pages of this chapter confirm my agreement with Schmidt's emphasis on God's active, or to quote Davlin, "plastic" creativity—the labor of "forming, breathing, building," that God is said to perform in the biblical account (Genesis 2: 7, 22)—I suggest that a parallel concern unfolds in these lines.

Certainly the process of writing embodies the "active exertion" of God's creativity: as I have noted above, "making letters" involves a material transfer of abstract ideas, fashioning a receptive piece of skin into the shape of the words in one's mind. But in this passus Wit begins to complicate his initial image of a solitary creator who makes the human body with his own hands. In comparison to God's creation of the beasts, Wit emphasizes the additional "myzt" required to create humankind: "As who seiþ, 'Moore moot herto þan my word oone:/ My myzt moot helpe now wiþ my speche'" (B.9.36–7). Humanity's mark of distinction is, of course, the "goost, of þe godhede of heuene" (B.9.46), the *imago dei* that exegetes from Augustine onwards recognized as the most perfect likeness of the Trinity, the aspect of each individual human being that is "moost lik" God "of marc and of shafte" (B.9.31).¹⁷ Thus in making humankind different from the animals, God employs his triune "myzt," a threefold

¹⁵ Schmidt, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, p. 440.

¹⁶ Schmidt, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, p. 440.

¹⁷ On Langland's exemplarism, see Daniel Murtaugh, "*Piers Plowman*" and the Image of God, pp. 15–21, and Clopper, "Songs of Rechelesnesse," pp. 105–44.

power of creation embodied in Wit's analogy of writing. While I would therefore agree with Schmidt's emphasis on God's physical involvement as a maker, I add to his argument a renewed emphasis on the formal significance of the plural verb "*Faciamus*" (B.9.35, 41a). Although Langland reserves his fullest discussion of the Trinity for a later passus, here he points to the relationship and function of the three persons as the specific means by which God created humankind and continues to manifest himself within the created universe. Unlike the ultimately incapable lord of Wit's hypothetical scenario, God's generative potency derives from his triune nature. Divine fullness finds expression through the pen and parchment of the Son and Holy Spirit when God, three persons in one, shapes man into being "þoru3 myzt of God almy3ty,/ Wiþ his word and werkmanshiþe and wiþ lif to laste" (B.9.44–5). To make sense of the textually corrupt lines containing the writing analogy, I would suggest a combination of the Kane-Donaldson and Schmidt readings, a meaning that can actually be reached through a slightly different interpretation of line 40 which Kane-Donaldson present as: "Thou3 he [wiste to] write neuer so wel,/ [and] he had [a] penne." I would reject Schmidt's emendation of line 38 in his edition, "and hym [ne] lakked parchemyn" for something nearer to Kane-Donaldson's "[if] hym lakked parchemyn," a reading they reach by replacing the attested reading "and" with "if," a possible meaning of "and" in that context. Similarly, in the next line then, I would read "[and] he had [a] penne" not in an additive sense, that the lord not only knows how to write letters, but also has a pen, but rather, following Kane-Donaldson's precedent in the previous line, as "[if] he had [a] penne," since "if" not "and" is attested in the manuscripts. Finally, I would follow Schmidt's incorporation of the attested reading "no" rather than Kane-Donaldson's emendation to "a," reading the line as "[if] he had [no] penne." Thus, the sense of the passage would be: "Just as if a lord intended to write letters, if he lacked parchment, even though he knew how to write exceedingly well, if he had no pen, the letter, despite the power of his lordship, would never be made." This reading is more balanced than either Kane-Donaldson's or Schmidt's emendations as the structure of the sentence now contains two propositions, "Right as" and "Thou3 he," followed by two parallel conditions, "if hym lakked" and "if he hadde no," which each declare the lack of an item necessary to the task at hand. Furthermore, the analogy as I have emended it isolates God in the person of the Father, "synguler hymself," having only the knowledge of making letters, and contrasts God's singular power ("al [his] lordshiþe") with the expressive capabilities of the Trinity when the powers of the Son and the Holy Spirit, the "parchemyn" and the "penne," are added to God's, or the Lord's, knowledge.

It remains, however, to explain the significance of these two implements and their relationship to the Trinity. Is there a neat correspondence, with one representing Christ and the other the Holy Spirit? Penn Szittyá offers a reading of the “parchemyn” and “penne” in his comparison of Wit’s analogy with Abelard’s writings on the Trinity.¹⁸ Szittyá proposes that Wit’s analogy is “a metaphor for the Trinity in creation” and compares it to two examples that Abelard uses to explain the interrelationship among the three persons of the Trinity. The Timaeian *Deus artifex* is one figure Abelard employs, and we might summarize his example as follows: God the Father is an artisan with the power to create; the Divine Ideas, like blueprints in God’s mind, direct the Father’s creativity and correspond to the Son, typically understood as the Word or Wisdom of God; finally, the Spirit is the work put into effect by the Father’s *potentia* and the Son’s *sapientia*, proceeding from both (*ab utroque*).¹⁹ Abelard similarly employs the image of a lute player, correlating the three components that combine to make music with the three persons of the Trinity: the art, or knowledge of playing the instrument, epitomizes the Father’s power or *potentia*; the hand that strokes the strings, giving outward expression to the Father’s knowledge, corresponds to the Son’s *sapientia*; finally, the reverberating strings of the lute, which make music by the collective work of the mind that knows how to play and the hands that act on the mind’s knowledge, signify the Spirit, “the manifestation of God’s love through his works.”²⁰ Abelard’s analogies thus present some striking parallels to Langland’s image in B.9:

The power of writing (“he wiste to write neuer so wel”) corresponds to the art of the musician and hence to the creative power of the *Deus artifex*, both of which Abelard says pertain to the Father. The pen, the agency which can put the art of writing into action, corresponds to the hand of the lute-player and to the plan of the *artifex*, which in Abelard pertain to the *Sapientia* of the Son. The parchment with letters on it, that is, the effect of the combined action of the pen and the power of writing, corresponds to the sounding strings, to the works of the *Deus artifex*, and so to the *Benignitas secundum effecta* of the Spirit, which proceeds from the Father and the Son, *ab utroque*.²¹

According to Szittyá’s demonstration of the parallels between Abelard’s and Langland’s Trinitarian imagery, the “penne” in Wit’s analogy must

¹⁸ See Penn Szittyá, “The Trinity in Langland and Abelard,” in *Magister Regis: Studies in Honor of Robert Earl Kaske*, ed. Arthur Groos et al. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), pp. 207–16.

¹⁹ Szittyá, “The Trinity in Langland and Abelard,” p. 211.

²⁰ Szittyá, “The Trinity in Langland and Abelard,” p. 212.

²¹ Szittyá, “The Trinity in Langland and Abelard,” pp. 214–15.

correspond to Christ and the “parchemyn” to the Holy Spirit. Certainly the “parchemyn” is the thing acted upon by the other two elements—the power of writing employs the instrumental pen to transform the blank parchment into a letter, much as the knowledge of the musician, in collaboration with the physical movements of his hands, produces the melody that emerges from the lute. The finished letter, like the melody, Szittyá suggests, is that which issues *ab utroque*.

Many questions remain unanswered by Szittyá’s reading, however, and I would like to explore an alternative interpretation that is strongly suggested by the appearance of Christ as a letter written on “parchemyn” elsewhere in Middle English literature and in *Piers Plowman* itself. Langland’s analogy, unlike Abelard’s two figures, actually supposes *four* components: the lord’s power of know-how, the parchment as raw material, the instrumental pen, and, the product of all three of these, the finished letter. The parchment is not itself a product of the other two components of the analogy, but has initially the same status as Abelard’s lute, a material apparatus that must be acted upon by the hands, as the parchment with the pen, to produce a cooperative result, that is, the music or the letter. Thus, strictly speaking, the lord’s knowledge of letter writing requires for its expression *two* tools, the receptive parchment and the instrumental pen. At one level, then, it does not matter whether the pen corresponds to Christ and the parchment to the Holy Spirit, as Szittyá suggests, or the reverse—it matters primarily that we apprehend both as instrumental complements to the Lord’s knowledge without either of which the Lord cannot express himself.

There is, however, a precedent for comparing Christ to a letter in the medieval *Charters of Christ* tradition, which flourished in the late fourteenth century.²² These texts constitute an example of a literary mode that represents the history of human salvation in documentary form. Collectively termed by Steiner the “archive of salvation,” such literary texts describe the validation and regulation of salvation in terms of documentary practice, mimicking the form of charters, pardons, and patents granting salvation according to specified conditions and rules of behavior. In contrast to the “chirograph” of sin described in Colossians 2: 14–15, which Augustine and other biblical commentators interpreted as “a record of original sin in the form of a written contract drawn up between humanity and the devil,” Christ himself becomes a document that rewrites human guilt: “[A] ‘new’ document of Christ, a *chirographum dei* drawn up

²² On the Charters of Christ tradition, see Keen, *The Charters of Christ*, and Steiner, *Documentary Culture*.

on the cross, emerges from the exegetical past to confront the devil's record, either by pardoning the debt owed, or by granting heaven."²³

The image of Christ as a charter takes various forms in late medieval English literature, but is most thoroughly represented in the texts which purport to be actual charters written by Christ. There exist five Middle English and two Latin examples of the *Charters of Christ* tradition, all of English provenance. The earliest, called the *Carta domini nostri Iesu Christi*, was composed in Latin and is found in a Franciscan preaching manual, the *Fasciculus morum*, composed c. 1300.²⁴ Verse charters begin to appear in the mid-fourteenth century with the so-called "Short Charter" and "Long Charter," whose popularity is attested by an extant twenty-five and eight manuscripts, respectively. These texts are closely modeled on the language of actual legal charters, documents that were used to proclaim the transfer or donation of land and specify the terms of its possession and use. Though its form and details vary in its several versions, the common theme of the tradition is Christ's granting to all of humanity, whom he hails as his tenants or heirs, the possession of the Kingdom of Heaven, with the provision that they faithfully pay the rent of obedience or love. Significantly, Christ's own body is the parchment upon which the charter is written, since it is his Incarnation that makes salvation possible. In the Long Charter, the instruments of Christ's torture and death become part of the production of the charter. The whips of the soldiers are the pens with which the charter is written and, accordingly, Christ's own blood acts as the ink. The *Charters* are sealed variously, with Christ's heart or with his five wounds. As Keen observes in her study of the tradition, "Christ's body has become a legal instrument, the document which grants salvation."²⁵ Medieval writers apparently found the metaphor a valuable tool for imagining Christ's salvific gift to humankind.

Piers Plowman features a reference to the *Charters* tradition in B.18 when, immediately following the Crucifixion, the Four Daughters of God convene to debate the meaning of the spectacular natural phenomena that

²³ Steiner, *Documentary Culture*, pp. 100, 104. The passage from Colossians 2: 14–15 reads: "Delens quod adversus non erat chirographium decreti, quod erat contrarium nobis, et ipsum tulit de medio, affigens illud cruci; et expolians principatus et potestates, traduxit confidenter, palam triumphans illos in semetipso." See Steiner's full discussion of the "chirograph" tradition in *Documentary Culture*, pp. 99–105.

²⁴ Keen describes this early example and other forms of the genre in *Charters of Christ*, 28–30. The Latin *Carta domini* is edited by Mary Caroline Spalding from a fifteenth-century manuscript. See Spalding, ed., *The Middle English Charters of Christ* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Bryn Mawr College, 1914). On the appearance of the *Carta domini* in the *Fasciculus morum*, see Siegfried Wenzel, *Verses in Sermons: Fasciculus morum and Its Middle English Poems* (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1978), pp. 146–7, 212–13.

²⁵ Keen, *Charters of Christ*, p. 44.

accompany Christ's death: "Eiþer asked ooþer of þis grete wonder—/ Of þe dyn and of þe derknesse, and how þe day rowed,/ And which a light and a leme lay bifore helle" (B.18.122–4). After Mercy and Truth have spoken, Peace arrives, proclaiming that Love (that is, Christ), has sent her a letter instructing that she and Mercy should together save humankind by acting as "mannes meynpernour," that is, one who serves as surety for the release of a prisoner according to the legal procedure of *mainprise* (B.18.184).²⁶ She waves the authoritative "patente" before her sisters, reading its text: "'*In pace in idipsum*,/ And þat þis dede shal dure, *dormiam et requiescam*'" (B.18.185–6).²⁷ The lines quoted from Psalm 4:9, "In peace in the selfsame I shall sleep and rest," declare the durability of the letter's promise. Though Peace's patent is not a fully fledged example of the *Charters of Christ* genre, as a letter sent from Love, who is Christ himself, immediately following the Crucifixion, the image nevertheless gestures toward the *Charter* tradition whereby Christ's own body acts as a document of salvation when he offers himself as surety for all those imprisoned in hell.

Langland's reference to the popular *Charter* genre in B.18, part of what Steiner describes as a broader poetic interest in "documenting" salvation, suggests an interpretive framework for Wit's letter-writing analogy in B.9. In wishing to write a letter, the lord of the analogy, who represents God the Father, intends first and foremost to achieve an expression of himself. Wit's writing analogy embodies Langland's implicit argument throughout the poem that creation is a material manifestation of God's love, an intimacy between creator and creation that Langland expresses in the figure Kynde. But the context of the *Charter* tradition prompts us to understand more. Initially, I have argued, the pen and the parchment both signify God's instruments—the parchment itself does not, as others have assumed, signify creation, which is rightly signified only by the finished letter. But the image of the parchment associatively prompts the image of Christ, who as the Word and as the Father's *sapientia* is the means by which God creates but also, as man, partakes of that creation by assuming "Adames kynde" (B.18.221). Wit's analogy therefore simultaneously gestures toward the Creation and the Incarnation, linking

²⁶ See Alford, *Piers Plowman: A Glossary of Legal Diction* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1988), pp. 93–4. Keen discusses this passage in *Charters of Christ*, pp. 90–4.

²⁷ A "patente," or letter patent, is a royal decree that is "not sealed up but exposed to open view and usually addressed to all subjects of the realm" (Alford, *Glossary*, p. 111). On the association of Peace's "patente" with the *chirographum* of Colossians 2: 14 and the significance of its citation of Psalm 4: 9, "In pace in idipsum," see Galloway, *The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman*, pp. 50–1. Steiner discusses Langland's documents, including letters patent, in "Piers Plowman and the Archive of Salvation," chapter 3 of *Documentary Culture*, pp. 93–142.

the two events together. Through God's Trinitarian self-expression, God first creates the universe and its inhabitants, including the special creation of humankind, and then sanctifies his creation when Christ, upon whose body the letter is written with the aid of the Holy Spirit, effects and guarantees the salvation of humankind.

Wit's depiction of divine creativity through the writing analogy appropriately and strategically follows his introduction of God as Kynde. The analogy attests to God's generative powers, elaborates the means by which God makes himself manifest in producing the created world, and, finally, "writes" or guarantees the salvation of humankind through the Incarnation of Christ. The name Kynde highlights God's fecundity, but Wit's analogy reveals that Trinitarian expressivity lies at the core of God's generativity. The appellation Kynde thus represents not only the Father's "myzt," but the fullness that enables God's self-revelation in created nature.

CHRIST AS "MENE"

To further elaborate the importance of God's Trinitarian self-expression as an aspect of the appellation Kynde, in the following pages I examine Christ's role as an intermediary between God and creation in *Piers Plowman*. Christ, the Word or *Logos*, is the means by which God creates, but Langland also insists that Christ is the means by which God gains knowledge of his creation and of himself. The principles of creating and knowing are the same: Christ, as "mene," effects a relationship between creator and creation, acting with the Holy Spirit as the instrumental means by which God expresses himself; but, as God incarnate, Christ also enables God to touch and to know his creation, which is finally to know himself. As Abraham explains to Will, "creatour weex creature to knowe what was bope" (B.16.215). The playful juxtaposition of "creatour/creature" here recalls the scholastic distinction made by the terms *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, an influence I discuss in detail below. Both sets of terms display the linguistic kinship of their constitutive parts, the second term growing out of the first just as creation issues from its creator. Finally, as the link between God and man, between Kynde and humankind, Christ becomes humanity's advocate and intercessor as *Natura* had been in the Chartrian tradition.

Langland expands his description of the Trinitarian relationship in the two *passus* following the narrator's vision of the Tree of Charity and focuses on Christ's instrumental role in the postlapsarian world. When the narrator wakes he meets Faith, or Abraham, who is searching after a knight with a peculiar "blasen" that portrays three persons in one body, all

alike “in mesure and lengþe” (B.16.179, 182). Abraham describes the three persons of the Trinity, teaching the poem’s narrator their names and elucidating the distinct roles of each: the first, called “*Pater*,” possesses “myȝt and maieſtee” and is the “makere of alle þyng” (B.16.184–5); the second, called “*Sothfastnesse Filius*,” is “*Wardeyn of þat wit haþ*” (B.16.186–7); and the third, the “*Holi Goost*,” is “[t]he light of al þat lif haþ a londe and a watre,/ Confortour of creatures,” and, Abraham adds, “of hym comeþ alle blisse” (16.188–90). Then, to further illustrate the relationships among the three persons, Abraham presents another Trinitarian analogy. Three things, Abraham says, are necessary to any lord worthy of that name: “*Might, and a mene his owene myȝte to knowe,/ Of hymself and of his seruauant, and what ſuffreþ hem boþe*” (B.16.192–3). Again comparing God to a lord, Abraham’s formulation recalls Wit’s analogy of the lord who wishes to write a letter. True lordship requires more than might alone. God in his fullness possesses “myȝt and maieſtee” to be sure, but, as part of his almighty power, and in fulfillment of it, God also comprises a “mene,” a servant or representative, who stands apart from him and reflects his majesty, as well as a third entity, somewhat more elusive than the first two, which also remains distinct from the Father’s might and in some capacity enables (“*ſuffreþ*”) the operation of the other two persons.

Abraham’s analogy is textually and theologically complex, and I follow the standard reading in isolating the three terms—“*Might*,” “*a mene*,” and “*what ſuffreþ hem boþe*”—as attributes of the three persons of the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, respectively.²⁸ The chief difficulty lies in the meaning of the clause “[o]f hymself and of his seruauant” (B.16.193). It must pertain to the lord’s “myȝte to knowe” in the preceding line, but does it describe the source of the “mene,” or the field of knowledge that the “mene” enables the lord to apprehend? Furthermore, if we understand the Son as the “mene,” then can the “seruauant” also refer to the Son, or does it rather point to the Holy Spirit?

Szittyá and Clopper both diverge from the usual reading of the passage in working out its complicated syntax, a feature that Clopper attributes to “a kind of grammatical lack of parallelism . . . since the Father and Son are identified with nouns . . . while the Holy Spirit is identified with a clause.”²⁹ Szittyá concludes that the “mene” is not Christ the Son but the Holy Spirit, which issues *ab utroque* “[o]f hymself,” that is, of the Father, “and of his seruauant,” whom Szittyá identifies as Christ

²⁸ See, for example, the note to 18.202–3 in Derek Pearsall, ed., *Piers Plowman: An Edition of the C-Text* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), p. 302.

²⁹ Clopper, “*Songes of Rechelesnesse*,” p. 122.

(B.16.193). Clopper, on the other hand, seeks to rectify the grammatical imprecision of the passage by connecting the three things required by the lord with the three nouns in the passage, “might,” a “mene,” and a “seruaunt.” “The worldly analogy,” Clopper argues, “suggests that there is a lord who has a servant and that there is a ‘mene’ who goes back and forth between them to make things known.”³⁰ According to Clopper, the “mene” is Christ and the “seruaunt” is the Holy Spirit. This reading is preferable to Szittyá’s, Clopper argues, since Szittyá’s identification of the “mene” as the Holy Spirit confuses Langland’s presentation of the customary order of the triad since the “mene” is the second of the three terms given and, therefore, does not match up with the Holy Spirit as the third term in the parallel passage. In arguing that the Holy Spirit is the “seruaunt,” however, Clopper denies that the “seruaunt” named two lines later, which unambiguously refers to Christ, is the same as the “seruaunt” of the first analogy.³¹ Here, having established the initial relationships among the Trinitarian persons, Abraham elaborates Christ’s role:

So God, þat gynnyng hadde neuere, but þo hym good þouzte,
Sente forþ his sone as for seruaunt þat tyme,
 To occupien hym here til issue were spronge—
 That is, children of charite, and Holi Chirche þe moder.

(B.16.194–7, emphasis added)

While I agree with Clopper’s identification of the “mene” as Christ, I argue that the clause “what suffreþ hem boþe” refers to the Holy Spirit. The “seruaunt” in line 193 ought to be defined with reference to the “seruaunt” in line 195, and these lines clearly depict the incarnate Christ as God’s servant. Both Clopper and Szittyá base their readings on a limited appreciation of the function of the “mene,” whose purpose is “to knowe.”

“The verb ‘knownen’ has a well-attested sense, ‘to make known, to show, to manifest,’” Szittyá explains. “Therefore, when Langland says a lord who claims lordship requires ‘a mene his owene myzte to knowe,’ a likely reading is that God requires a ‘means to make his own might known.’”³² God’s triune complements, his Son and the Holy Spirit, do both act as intermediaries in manifesting God’s might, as Wit’s previous analogy of the expressive instruments of the “penne” and “parchemyn” shows. Christ, as God incarnate, presents an even more tangible manifestation of God than the Spirit does, for Christ not only enables God’s creative powers as the

³⁰ Clopper, *Songes of Rechelesnesse*, p. 122.

³¹ Clopper, *Songes of Rechelesnesse*, p. 121.

³² Szittyá, “The Trinity in Langland and Abelard,” p. 213. See *MED*, s.v. “knauen,” 7a.

Word through which God creates, but he himself becomes part of that creation and takes on flesh, becoming the embodiment of God on earth. If the function of the “mene” is to make God’s might known externally, Christ would arguably be a better candidate to fill this role than the immaterial, though undoubtedly influential Spirit. But when Langland speaks of the lord’s need for “a mene his owene myzte to knowe,” we might profitably consider the meanings of the verb “knouen” in its primary active senses, “to be aware of,” “to know,” “to learn, find out, or discover,” or even “to experience.”³³ The lord, through the efforts of an intermediary, *finds out* his own might; that is, the lord gains self-definition through distinction from another and, further, as I will discuss below, through the experiences of the “mene” that issues from him in becoming man.

Langland’s theology as presented by this analogy is imaginatively complicated to say the least and requires further exploration, particularly in his characterization of Christ as a “mene.” Christ as well as his mother Mary are traditionally considered intermediaries between man and God, able to intercede on man’s behalf and gain God’s merciful judgment. The narrator exhorts his audience to pray for God’s mercy and to ask Mary to be the “meene bitwene” themselves and God and, combined with good works, thereby gain grace rather than seek profitlessly after pardons and indulgences (B.7.197). Langland refers to Christ himself as an intercessory channel quite early in the poem when Holy Church describes Love’s descent from heaven to take the form of flesh and blood on earth: “Forþi is loue ledere of þe Lordes folk of heuene,/ And a meene, as þe mair is, [inmiddes] þe kyng and þe commune” (B.1.159–60). Because he issues from heaven, as an envoy, Christ takes the role of mediator between human beings, the “commune,” and God, the “kyng.” The Samaritan later summarizes Christ’s merciful intercession for humankind: “So wole Crist of his curteisie, and men crye hym mercy,/ Boþe forzyue and foryete, and ȝit bidde for vs/ To þe Fader of heuene forȝifnesse to haue” (B.17.242–4). Christ, like Natura, is envisioned as humankind’s advocate, a function both figures can perform precisely because each occupies a medial position between the divine and the earthly.

The motif of *Natura plangens*, a role in which Natura promotes the human cause, reaches at least as far back as Claudian’s *De raptu Proserpinae*. There, when Jupiter arrests the spontaneous growth of crops in order to encourage lazy humankind to reform itself, Natura, saddened by the poor condition of her realm, implores Jupiter to make amends. Natura is similarly the agent of worldly transformation and renovation in Bernard’s

³³ MED, s.v. “knouen,” v. 1a, 2c., 3a–b, 4.

Cosmographia where she complains to God on behalf of Silva, begging that the formless chaos may be shaped into a more respectable condition: “infantia mundi/ Vagit et ad speciem vestiri cultius orat” [the infant universe squalls, and cries to be clothed with finer appearance] (I.1: 39–40). Her complaint sets into motion the events of creation, as Noys, the mind of God, refines Silva’s turbulence into the four elements, and weds Silva to the World-Soul so that previously chaotic matter becomes the ordered and living Mundus. In subsequent appearances, including the *De planctu* and *Roman de la Rose*, Natura tends to complain *about* rather than *on behalf of* humankind, though, at least in some instances, her criticisms appear to be motivated by a benevolent desire to promote reform.

Langland again seems to be reaching back to the older tradition in depicting Christ the “mene” between God and man as a kind of *Natura plangens*. For it is Christ’s *kynde*, or human nature, that prompts his most eloquent and extended plea on humanity’s behalf in B.18. Looking forward to Judgment Day, Christ promises that he will return as a king and “haue out of helle alle mennes soules” (B.18.373):

Ac to be merciable to man þanne, my kynde it askep,
 For we beþ breþeren of blood, ac noȝt in baptisme alle.
 Ac alle þat beþ myne hole breþeren, in blood and in baptisme,
 Shul noȝt be dampned to þe deef þat is wiþouten ende:
Tibi soli peccaui. (B.18.376–9a)

Christ intriguingly hints that his kinship with humankind, the shared “kynde” that he has adopted through his Incarnation, will move him to extend his mercy broadly on Judgment Day: “For I were an vnkynde kyng but I my kyn holpe” (B.18.399). Indeed, some readers interpret this passage as evidence that Langland endorsed, or at least explored, a theory of universal salvation, an issue I discuss at length in Chapter 5. Crucially for my purposes here, Christ’s pity for his brethren, and his stated intention to intercede on their behalf, depends upon his participation in human nature: “my kynde it askep” (B.18.376). Christ’s “kynde,” a word that reverberates with and links Christ to Langland’s previous representations of God as Kynde, tempers his divinity with human experience.³⁴ In promising mercy, however, Christ does not overturn the Old Law of justice. William J. Birnes has illustrated how Christ exalts the law in this episode even as he acts as advocate for humankind against the devil’s rival claims.³⁵

³⁴ On Langland’s representation of Christ’s kinship with human beings in *kynde*, see Davlin, “‘Kynde Knowynge’ as a Major Theme,” pp. 14–15; Mann “Eating and Drinking,” p. 43; and Watson, “Visions of Inclusion,” p. 159.

³⁵ William J. Birnes, “Christ as Advocate: The Legal Metaphor of *Piers Plowman*,” *Annuaire Mediaevale* 16 (1975): pp. 71–93. On the theme of Christ’s debate with the devil

In a passage anticipated by the debate between the Four Daughters of God, Christ and the devil appear as two lawyers arguing over humankind's eternal fate. Christ does not, as he presumably might, simply assert his superiority as God and seize humanity from the devil's clutches; instead, he methodically demonstrates how his claim to humankind rests within the law, presenting an array of legal arguments that, as Birnes notes, "have been so arranged that all of Lucifer's avenues of appeal are closed."³⁶ First Christ charges the devil with deceit in tempting Adam and Eve to commit the original sin that condemned humankind thereafter. This treachery alone might nullify the devil's claim, but Christ takes his argument yet further.³⁷

According to the Old Law, which Christ has not come to abolish but to fulfill, the devil's guile may rightly be countered with another cunning deed and, thus, modeled on the Old Testament legal principle "*Dentem pro dente et oculum pro oculo*" (B.18.340a), Christ offers himself in exchange for humankind, arguing:

Ergo, soule shal soule quyte and synne to synne wende,
 And al þat man haþ mysdo, I, man wole amende it.
 Membre for membre was amendes by þe Olde Lawe,
 And lif for lif also—and by þat lawe I clayme
 Adam and al his issue at my wille hereafter. (B.18.341–5)

Christ's argument that his body, "[m]embre for membre," serves as a sort of ransom or bail to release human beings from eternal damnation recalls both Mercy's speech a few lines above, where Love's letter instructs her to act with Peace as "mannes meynpernour" and thereby secure humanity's release from prison, as well as the larger *Charters of Christ* tradition of which Love's letter is an example. Christ presents himself now in personal and bodily form—as "meynpernour," literally as a hand taker³⁸—as surety for humankind. Finally, Christ asserts his royal right as king of heaven by analogy with a custom of English law whereby a king who happens to pass by the scene of an execution should pardon the felon: "Lawe wolde he

and its appearance in other literary texts, see C.W. Marx, *The Devil's Rights and the Redemption in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995), and Jim Rhodes, *Poetry Does Theology: Chaucer, Grosseteste, and the Pearl-Poet* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), pp. 44–6, 65–71.

³⁶ Birnes, "Christ as Advocate," p. 85.

³⁷ Birnes, "Christ as Advocate," p. 82, notes the extension of the Writ of Deceit in 1367 to include cases of fraud or trickery, speculating that Langland might have referred to an actual English law with Christ's initial invalidation of the devil's claim.

³⁸ See Alford's entry for "mainpernour," in *Piers Plowman: A Glossary of Legal Diction*, p. 93.

yeue hym lif, and he loked on hym" (B.18.384).³⁹ Imagining just such a scene, in which Christ might observe human suffering as a result of damnation, Christ vows that he will respond with mercy: "For blood may suffre blood boþe hungry and acale,/ Ac blood may noȝt se blood blede, but hym rewe" (B.18.395–6). Christ's ultimate plea on man's behalf is based on his kinship with humankind, a natural bond that demands a response of mercy from Christ as both kin and king. The fusing of justice and mercy in B.18 mirrors, and indeed issues from, Christ's uniquely dual nature as "God-Man" (B.11.205). As "mene," Christ is a representative or negotiator on humanity's behalf, championing the human cause against the devil's claims and, as the Samaritan promises, interceding with God the Father for those who "crys hym mercy": Christ will "[b]oþe forȝyue and forȝete, and ȝit bidde for vs/ To þe Fader of heuene forȝifnesse to haue" (B.17.242–4). All this is possible because, as Holy Church's account of Love's "fall" from heaven to earth implies, Christ is a "mene" in a sense even more fundamental than his hierarchical mediation "inmyddes þe kyng and þe commune" (B.1.160), between Creator and creation: as "God-Man" (B.11.205) and *Deus homo* (C.3.401a), Christ unites the divine and the human in his very nature. In the next section of this chapter I will consider how Christ's characterization as a "mene" sanctifies nature in *Piers Plowman* and further elucidates Langland's purpose in naming God Kynde.

KYNDE, *NATURA NATURANS*, AND ROBERT GROSSETESTE'S *CHÂTEAU D'AMOUR*

In seeking some precedent from which Langland might have derived his figure Kynde, Hugh White considers the scholastic formulation *natura naturans*, a possibility first suggested by A.V.C. Schmidt who, in his 1987 edition of the poem, glosses Kynde as "Nature's creator" (*natura naturans*) not "created Nature" (*natura naturata*).⁴⁰ This useful distinction between Creator and creation arises in the thirteenth century, appearing in works by Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, and, later, Ramon Lull, and seems ultimately to derive from Latin translations of Averroës's commentary on

³⁹ On the evidence for this custom, see W.W. Skeat, ed., *The Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman in Three Parallel Texts*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1886), pp. 263–4, and Alford, *Piers Plowman: A Glossary of Legal Diction*, p. 67.

⁴⁰ White, *Nature and Salvation*, p. 62. Schmidt, ed., *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, p. 439.

Aristotle.⁴¹ White, however, concludes that the notion *natura naturans/naturata* is ill-suited as a gloss on Langland's figure Kynde. The pair of scholastic terms seeks to interpose "a distance between this nature [*natura naturans*] and what it creates [*natura naturata*]," a function that White suggests cannot accord with Langland's obvious interest to "define God with reference to the natural world."⁴² While I agree with White's objection in principle—I likewise aim to demonstrate Langland's efforts to highlight God's intimacy with his creation through the figure of Kynde—I offer below another possibility for understanding the scholastic terminology that both suggests a precedent for Kynde and accords with the notion that Creator and creation are distinct but not distant.

But before we examine that alternative, I would like to pursue further the course taken by White. He points to "a rather tighter process of derivation" offered by the juristic phrase "*Natura, id est Deus*," a legal formulation influenced by the *natura naturans/naturata* distinction.⁴³ In commentaries on Ulpian's definition of the natural law as "what Nature has taught all animals," jurists glossed Nature with the phrase "*Natura, id est Deus*" apparently in order to identify natural law with divine law, and thereby reconciling Ulpian's definition with Gratian's more overtly Christian definition of natural law as "*quod in lege et euangelio continetur*" [what is contained in the Law and the Gospel].⁴⁴ White prefers the juristic association of God and Nature, made widely available in the *Glossa Ordinaria*, to the scholastic distinction that informed it, since the juristic notion more closely aligns Creator and creation. Furthermore, as White adds, Langland was clearly interested if not actually schooled in legal terminology, and in fact seems to draw on the Ulpianic definition of natural law in B.12 when Imaginatif describes Kynde as the instructor of all the animals, a scene that the narrator has observed from atop Midelerpe.⁴⁵ The juristic formulation that identifies God as the promulgator

⁴¹ See H. Siebeck, "Ueber die Entstehung der Termini *natura naturans* und *natura naturata*," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 3 (1890): pp. 370–8, and Henry Lucks, "*Natura Naturans: Natura naturata*," *New Scholasticism* 9 (1935): pp. 1–24.

⁴² White, *Nature and Salvation*, p. 63.

⁴³ See Tierney, "*Natura, id est Deus: A Case of Juristic Pantheism?*" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24 (1963): pp. 307–22. Tierney discusses the phrase with reference to the scholastic distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* in order to refute the pantheistic overtones the association of God and nature might imply.

⁴⁴ Tierney, "*Natura, id est Deus*," pp. 309–10. All citations of the *Decretum* refer to the *Corpus iuris canonici*, 2 vols., ed. Emil Ludwig Richter, with revisions by Emil Friedberg (Leipzig, 1879; reprint Graz: Akademische Druck, U. Verlagsanstalt, 1959), I.1.

⁴⁵ White, *Nature and Salvation*, p. 65. I address Langland's notion of natural law and discuss B.11–12 in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

of natural law, and the close association of God and nature that this notion describes, very likely informed Langland's invention of Kynde.

Here I suggest a further possibility for Kynde's connection to the scholastic source of that legal formulation, an instance in which the *naturans/naturata* distinction intensifies the bond between divinity and nature rather than, as White objects, diminishing it. The academic terminology was in fact conveyed into the vernacular in the thirteenth century by Robert Grosseteste's Anglo-Norman poem known as *Le Château d'amour*.⁴⁶ Grosseteste was chancellor of Oxford during the university's foundational years and later served as bishop of Lincoln from 1235 until his death in 1253.⁴⁷ His diverse writings range from early scientific treatises on light and other natural phenomena, commentaries on Aristotle, translations from Greek sources, and, in later years, more directly theological works including a *Hexameron* (an outgrowth of his interest in natural philosophy), exegetical commentaries on such biblical books as Psalms and Galatians, as well as numerous sermons and other pastoral writings. A testament to his concern with pastoral instruction, the Anglo-Norman *Château* presents Grosseteste's central theological ideas in allegorical form, its scope encompassing the creation of the world, the redemption of humankind by Christ's Incarnation and the continuing activity of the Church, and finally the Last Judgment following the destruction of the world. The work is at once popular in conception and intellectually complex; given its scope, R.W. Southern points out that the *Château* is "the nearest [Grosseteste] came to a *Summa Theologiae*" while also "the fullest expression of his pastoral theology for a popular audience."⁴⁸

Manuscript evidence suggests that Grosseteste's "outline of theology for the laity" succeeded in reaching a wide audience. The Anglo-Norman *Château* was an exceptionally popular text and survives in sixteen manuscripts, the majority of which date from the thirteenth or very early fourteenth century.⁴⁹ An English translation appears in various forms from around 1300, with its most complete version, which gives the

⁴⁶ The *Château d'amour* was probably not the title given by Grosseteste. Half of the Anglo-Norman manuscripts lack a title heading, and those that do bear titles do not agree. The most complete English translation of the Anglo-Norman poem, contained in the Vernon manuscript, has the heading *Castel off Loue*. See Kari Sajavaara, *The Middle English Version of Robert Grosseteste's Château d'amour* (Helsinki: Société Néophilologique, 1967), pp. 372–3. I discuss the extant manuscripts of each tradition below.

⁴⁷ James McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. xi–xii.

⁴⁸ R.W. Southern, *Robert Grosseteste: The Growth of an English Mind in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 224–5.

⁴⁹ Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 224; Sajavaara, *Middle English Version*, pp. 36–48.

work its commonly used title, contained in the Vernon manuscript dating to around 1390.⁵⁰

The *Château* and *Piers* share at least one major allegorical set-piece, the debate between the four daughters of God and, a parallel concern, the question of the devil's rights, which I have discussed above.⁵¹ Indeed, although these particular similarities would perhaps not present themselves to a reader of the Vernon manuscript, which contains the A-text of *Piers* ending at 9.183, the Vernon's inclusion of *Piers* and the *Château* indicates a general recognition of the similarities of thought and expression in the two poems.

Here I would like to propose another major convergence of the two poems that suggests it was the Anglo-Norman *Château* in particular that influenced Langland's theological and poetic vision. For while the English translation is largely faithful to Grosseteste's Anglo-Norman text, it does make some important variations, including the omission of a complex passage that describes the Virgin Mary as an allegorical castle into which God enters when he becomes incarnate as Christ. This passage comes rather late in the text but is undoubtedly its central moment thematically and theologically. The narrative, based on an interpretation of Luke's statement that Jesus "intravit in quoddam castellum" (Luke 10: 38), emphasizes the Virgin's supreme suitability as a "beau lu" (a "feir stude") into which God might descend (568).⁵² The Virgin as a dwelling-place or vessel for the divine represents for Grosseteste the highest perfection of human nature before Christ's Incarnation. Ornately crafted and unassailable in her purity, Mary is "le chastel de delit" (659) that God himself created for this special purpose and so cherishes that he ultimately condescends to dwell there: "Kar Dampnedeu le devisa/ A sun oès pur herbergier;/ Mult eime le liu e tient chier" (656–8).⁵³ Through this "lodging" with the Virgin, God unites his divine nature with human nature, "dous natures joindre ensemble" in the incarnate Christ, "verrai Deu e verrai home" (836, 846).

⁵⁰ Sajavaara, *Middle English Version*, p. 102–9.

⁵¹ On the similarities between Grosseteste's and Langland's poems, see Ronald Waldron, "Langland's Originality: The Christ-Knight and the Harrowing of Hell," in *Medieval English Religious and Ethical Literature*, ed. Gregory Kratzmann and James Simpson (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1986), pp. 66–81, and Rhodes, *Poetry Does Theology*, pp. 43–71. Neither study, however, discusses Grosseteste's use of the scholastic terminology *natura naturans/naturata* as a possible influence on Langland's conception of Kynde as a name for God.

⁵² Unless otherwise noted, quotations of the *Château* are from J. Murray, ed., *Le Château d'amour de Robert Grosseteste* (Paris: Librairie Champion, 1918). Translations, where possible, are given from the Middle English version edited by Sajavaara.

⁵³ "For God of heuene hit hihte al/ And wrouȝte hit himself and al dude,/ To alihten in pulke feyre stude/ From his kindam aboue./ He cudde þe stude muche loue!" (752–6).

Indeed, Grosseteste proposes, in this joining of natures that the Incarnation enacts, God the creator of all nature, the “nature naturante,” perfects the “nature naturee” to a degree surpassing its original creation:

Mult est nature enbelie,
 Kant nature naturante
 A nature est ioynnante,
 Ke nature est naturee.
 Lores est nature puree,
 Cent tant plus ke einz ne esteit
 Avant que Adam forfet aveit. (866–72)⁵⁴

[Nature was much embellished when God, ‘natura naturans,’ was joined to Nature, ‘natura naturata.’ Then was Nature purified a hundred times more than it was before Adam had sinned.]

Significantly, these lines are omitted from the English translation of the *Château*. The translator, like Grosseteste, seeks a broad audience—but here, in a telling sign of the political and cultural changes during the century and a half that separates the two texts, the translator wishes to open up the text for English speakers, “him þat con not iknowen/ Nouþer French ne Latyn” (36–7). Seeking to communicate with “lewed men,” the English translator perhaps considered the scholastic concept *natura naturans* unnecessarily difficult for a popular audience and, moreover, not readily translatable; as Southern notes, the idea was relatively new and controversial in its daring conflation of God and nature, and might lead to misunderstandings by unlearned or indiscriminating audiences.⁵⁵

The notion, however, contains the heart of Grosseteste’s theology. That God is “nature naturante,” the nature that *natures*, accords with Grosseteste’s assertion elsewhere that the natural world is a mirror (“speculum”) that reflects the image of its creator, such that every last created thing (“omnis creatura”), even the smallest speck of dust (or “atomus”), has been carefully ordained by God to reveal his nature in symbolic miniature.⁵⁶ Grosseteste’s exemplarist vision locates the unity of God and nature in the event of creation: the created world is designed to reflect its creator, and everywhere traces of the creator appear in the things of creation. But Grosseteste goes further. The Incarnation even more firmly unifies the two

⁵⁴ Here I follow Southern’s emendations to Murray’s edition and give Southern’s translation in *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 227, n. 35, excepting the final phrase “forfet aveit,” which I translate following the definition of “forfaire” in the Anglo-Norman Dictionary.

⁵⁵ Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 227–8.

⁵⁶ See Grosseteste, *Dictum* 60, edited in Servus Gieben, “Traces of God in Nature according to Robert Grosseteste: With the Text of the Dictum ‘Omnis creatura speculum est,’” *Franciscan Studies* 24 (1964): pp. 144–58. See also Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 216–18.

"natures" (God and his creation) when the God-Man Christ integrates the divine and the natural in his person. In fact, in this unifying function, the Incarnation is so crucial to Grosseteste's theology that he maintains the absolute predestination of Christ, the idea that Christ would have become man even if Adam had not sinned.⁵⁷ In joining the divine to the natural, the Incarnation perfects human nature and fulfills the human potential for deification. As Southern explains, "Only so could the human race achieve its fullness of being; only so could the Creation be complete and Nature beatified."⁵⁸ To Grosseteste's mind, this consecration of created nature achieved by the Incarnation is predicated by the initial creation based on the Aristotelian notion of potentiality: like the tree contained within an acorn, the perfection of human nature in Christ was for Grosseteste already implicated in God's original design of the universe.⁵⁹

Grosseteste's position corresponds with the Incarnational mindset that begins to develop from the twelfth century forward as theologians following Anselm sought to investigate *why* God became man and to consider the implications of that prodigious event. As Jim Rhodes argues in a study of the outgrowth of Incarnation theology in fourteenth-century English poetry, understanding the Incarnation rather than the Redemption as the central event in salvation history promotes a humanist vision, an optimistic assessment of human beings' natural existence. In the lines from the *Château* discussed above, God finds Mary's pure body a fit dwelling place. Similarly, the Incarnation "affirms human dignity and the sanctity of the human body" as Christ's unification of the divine and the natural presupposes the value of human nature—it was worthy to be united with the divine in Christ—and then augments it further.⁶⁰ "Grosseteste conflates God with nature to show that nature is like God in its drive to wed spirit and matter and to suggest that the incarnation is the appointed goal of nature's growth," Rhodes explains.⁶¹ In deploying the scholastic terminology *natura naturans*, Grosseteste demonstrates how thoroughly God permeates his creation, not only in its initial genesis, but in its potential

⁵⁷ On this feature of Grosseteste's theology, see D.J. Unger, O.F.M. Cap., "Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln (1235–53), on the Reasons for the Incarnation," *Franciscan Studies* 16 (1956): pp. 1–36; McEvoy, "The Absolute Predestination of Christ in the Theology of Robert Grosseteste," in *Sapientiae Doctrina: Mélanges de théologie et de littérature médiévales offerts à Dom Hildebrand Bascour, O.S.B.*, Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale 1 (Leuven: Abbaye du Mont Cesar: 1980), pp. 212–30; Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 219–25; and Rhodes, *Poetry Does Theology*, pp. 47–9.

⁵⁸ Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 222.

⁵⁹ Southern discusses the philosophical basis of Grosseteste's elaboration of the absolute predestination of Christ in *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 219–25.

⁶⁰ Rhodes, *Poetry Does Theology*, p. 3.

⁶¹ Rhodes, *Poetry Does Theology*, p. 62.

as fulfilled by the Incarnation of Christ, when, as Langland puts it, “creatour weex creature” (B.16.215). Joining divinity to nature, the integration effected by Christ’s Incarnation casts a sanctifying light on all of creation.

Rather than emphasizing the separation of God and nature, Grosseteste’s imaginative, vernacular, and pastoral adaptation of the scholastic term *natura naturans* does just the opposite: like Kynde, Grosseteste’s terminology affirms the intimacy between God and nature and demonstrates how this relationship can serve as the basis of a sophisticated theological inquiry. I propose the *Château* as one of several bridging texts that brought the Neoplatonic theories of nature that flourished into the twelfth century into contact with the Aristotelian worldview that dominated Langland’s day. The *Château* represents a crucial vernacular poetic model for *Piers Plowman*’s daring merger of creator and creation in the figure Kynde, for its representation of the Creation and the Incarnation as linked acts of divine self-manifestation, and for its consequent optimism toward the value of nature. Like Grosseteste, Langland, too, plumbs the depths of nature’s capacity to accommodate divinity.

DIVINE FULLNESS AND THE “DEEP OF KYNDE”

The last section of this chapter examines the implication of the divine in sexuality and death in *Piers Plowman*, spheres in which we may be surprised to find God, but that are, I will suggest, not only crucially interrelated with one another but also with the poem’s larger argument about divine creativity. While readers have explored Langland’s sanctification of sexuality in his celebration of marriage and uncovered the profound role that suffering plays in the poem’s soteriology, these two aspects of creaturely, or *kynde*, experience remain to be examined together.⁶² In each of these roles, Langland involves God in the “neediness” of *kynde* while revealing the divine plenitude that subtends all of creation: as Kynde assures Will in the poem’s conclusion, love is the antidote to “lakke” (B.20.249). Kynde’s parting words suggest that in

⁶² On sexuality and marriage, see Tavormina, *Kindly Similitude*; Andrew Galloway, “Intellectual Pregnancy, Metaphysical Femininity, and the Social Doctrine of the Trinity in *Piers Plowman*,” *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 12 (1998): pp. 117–52; and Davis, “*Piers Plowman* and the *Querelle* of the Rose.” On *kynde*, suffering, and salvation, see Davlin, “Kynde Knowynge as a Major Theme”; White, *Nature and Salvation*, pp. 78–84; Mann, “The Nature of Need”; and Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*.

loving human beings have access to a salvific plenitude that is the source of nature and, finally, the herald of God's grace.

In examining God's involvement with *kynde* in these roles, moreover, we can once again gauge Langland's response to the Natura tradition.⁶³ In the poem's representation of God as Kynde and in its several related representations of the divine presence in creation, Langland appropriates to divinity an intimacy with creaturely life that had been the province of Natura in the earlier tradition. In the case of Kynde's association with death, however, Langland reverses Natura's traditional opposition to the inevitable destiny of all material things. In this, Langland also complicates his own vision of divine creativity—God creates, and God destroys—but even Kynde's sponsorship of death is ultimately part of the poem's depiction of a capacious God whose every action teaches human beings to love.

Once more, Langland's Trinitarian analogies are the key to the poem's vision of divine proximity in *kynde*. In these analogies, Langland explores the means by which God continuously unfolds himself into the material world, seeking satisfaction in his creation. This unfolding is imagined most vividly in the Samaritan's analogy of the Trinitarian hand in B.17, an episode I described in this book's Introduction as a model for how to read spiritual truths in nature. "And as my fust is ful hand *yfolden* togideres,/ So is þe Fader a ful God, formour and shappere," the Samaritan explains (B.17.167–8, emphasis added). Here I revisit the Samaritan to examine the stakes of Langland's depiction of God as a craftsman who shapes and "handles" his creation, much like the anthropomorphic deity of the creation scenes discussed above. In concluding this chapter's analysis of the poem's representation of God's intimate involvement with creaturely life, I suggest that Kynde's appearance alongside Death in the poem's final passus is not, as it first seems, at odds with the Samaritan's elaboration of divine generativity but a manifestation of the law of balance by which the triune God "[h]alt al þe wide world wipinne" his grasp, "[b]oþe wolkne and þe wynd, water and erþe,/ Heuene and helle and al þat þer is inne" (B.17.160–2).

As we have seen, in comparing the Father to a closed fist, the Son to an outgoing finger, and the Holy Spirit to the mediatory palm, the Samaritan's analogy dramatically links divine triunity and divine creativity: God creates the world because he is "ful"—of "myȝt," of love, of persons, of "craft," of nature itself (B.17.167–9, 171). Indeed, the Samaritan

⁶³ Indeed, in the only other study to consider Langland's debt to the Natura tradition at any length, Davis, "*Piers Plowman* and the *Querelle*," argues that Langland celebrates wedded sexuality in response to Alan and the *Roman*.

describes God's Trinitarian "fullness" as both impetus and instrument of his self-expression in creation: "The Fader was first as a fust wiþ o fynger folden,/ Til hym louede and list to vnlosen his fynger" (B.17.139–40, my emphasis). In other words, as a closed fist opens to reveal its hidden dimensions, so the Christian deity, comprising three persons in one God, is not only capable of making things but, urged by his fullness, *desires* to do so. Paradoxically, then, God's plenitude manifests as a need. While human need is predicated on lack, God's need is a function of his burgeoning fullness.

The Samaritan describes God's creative activity in emphatically tactile terms, not as the abstract expression of divine ideas, but intimately as "craft" and "werkmanshipe" (B.17.171, 175). His Trinitarian fullness both urges God to show himself and facilitates that self-expression, an instrumentality that Langland highlights by describing the opened hand's capacity "to touche," "to feele," "to portreye or peynten," "to clucche," "to clawe," "to clippe," and "to holde," to name only a few of the "handling" verbs that appear in the passage (B.17.150–1, 170, 189). Having described God as a loving craftsman—as a creator who makes *because* he loves—the Samaritan's subsequent analogy of the taper accordingly presents sins against the Holy Spirit, specifically murder, as the worst of all human transgressions, for such acts undo God's handiwork. "[U]nkynde creatures þat coueite to destruye" that which "Oure Lorde shapte" in effect reverse Kynde's creative work—"[f]or þat kynde doop, unkynde fordoop"—and, by extinguishing life and love, stifle the warmth of God's grace (B.17.216–17, 273).

By using the metaphor of the craftsman, then, the Samaritan describes God's creativity as an intimate, tactile activity, as an expression of love. Within this dominant metaphor, however, the Samaritan also describes God's creativity in the more organic terms of sexual fecundity. While I have argued that the secularization and sexualization of Natura gradually chips away at the goddess's moral authority, in recuperating Natura's traditional properties in Kynde, Langland recasts the language of human sexuality to describe God's creative presence in creaturely life. In the Samaritan's analogy, the outstretched fingers endow God with embodied modes of sensory perception, specifically here the sense of touch:

The fynGRES þat fre ben to folde and to serue
 Bitoknen sooply þe Sone, þat sent was til erþe,
 That touched and tastede at techynge of þe pawme
 Seinte Marie, a mayde, and mankynde lauȝte:
Qui conceptus est de Spiritu Sancto...

The Fader is þanne as a fust wiþ fynger to touche

(*Quia 'Omnia traham ad me ipsum...*')

Al þat þe pawme parceyueþ profitable to feele. (B.17.146–51)

Langland exploits the image's connotations of "handling," mobilizing the cognate verbs "touche," "taste," "lauzte" (the past tense of "lacchen," to seize), and "feele." Here, particularly in his deployment of the verb "tasten," Langland appropriates the terms of human sexuality to describe divine fecundity. The primary meaning of "tasten" reiterates the sense of its paired verb "touchen" (to touch), as "to make physical contact with someone or some thing."⁶⁴ Christ "tastes" Mary in this literal sense, becoming physically joined to her body through his conception and gestation in her womb. "Tasten" may also indicate the acquisition of knowledge about a thing in a more abstract sense, as "to test" or "to try."⁶⁵ This sense recalls the Annunciation, in which the angel Gabriel visits Mary prior to her conception and finds her "a meke þyng wiþalle," a scene Will witnesses in the Trinitarian drama that unfolds from the vision of the Tree of Charity in the previous passus (B.16.91). More complicated to reconcile with this holy scene, however, is the association of "tasten" with sexual activity, as Langland himself employs it when the narrator perceives Haukyn's lechery upon his sin-stained coat: "For ech a maide þat he mette, he made hire a signe/ Semyng to synneward, and somtyme he gan taste/ Aboute þe mouþ or byneþe bigynneþ to grope" (B.13.345–7).⁶⁶ Although even in conceiving Christ Mary remains perpetually a "mayde," Langland uses the terms of human sexuality to emphasize God's entry into the world through a human womb. In the person of the Son, and by the instruction of the Holy Spirit, God also "tastes" and thereby takes "man-kynde," that is, assumes the nature and form of a human being (B.17.148–9). The Samaritan's emphasis on the sense of touch, including its suggestion of sexual touch, further elaborates Langland's vision of a God who is actively, tangibly engaged in the process of creation and in the life of his creatures. Moreover, this instance suggests how Langland reverses the losses of Natura's sexualization. When the Samaritan describes Christ's conception with the verb "tasten," a term that, as in the case of Haukyn's "grop[ing]," contains a potentially bawdy connotation, the context of the surrounding passage ensures that we do not feel he has exposed a sacred event to parody, but the other way around: Christ's reaching down to "touch and taste" a maid *redeems* Haukyn's acts of common lechery.

⁶⁴ MED, s.v. "tasten," v. 2a–b.

⁶⁵ MED, s.v. "tasten," v. 4.

⁶⁶ On the association with sexuality, see MED, s.v. "tasten," v. 2a, 3a–b.

The Samaritan's procreative language in fact develops a paradigm of divine fecundity set out in Abraham's preceding comparison of the Trinity to the three things necessary "for a lord þat lordshipe cleymeþ" (B.16.191). Here, as we have seen, Abraham also uses procreative terms to express Christ's role as a "mene" or "seruaunt" who emanates from the unity of the Godhead:

So God, þat gynnyng hadde neuere, but þo hym good þouzte,
 Sente forþ his sone as for seruaunt þat tyme,
 To ocupien hym here til issue were spronge—
 That is, children of charite, and Holi Chirche þe moder. (B.16.194–7)

As Abraham explains, Christ extends the generative power of the Trinity through the fertile influence of his life, dwelling among human beings as a man "til issue"—that is, Christendom—"were spronge" (B.16.196). But Abraham's analogy anticipates the Samaritan's description of divine fecundity in other ways, too. Although "ocupien hym" can mean "to keep oneself busy," as Christ certainly did, the Middle English verb "ocupien" also points to a more specific set of actions, including the legally and politically inflected senses "to seize," "to inhabit," or "to possess" a land or a residence, which relate to its more generalized meaning "to take up space."⁶⁷ Christ's occupation suggests a physically dynamic action that accords with the "fullness" of divine plenitude that I have been tracing, and the reflexivity of the construction—Christ occupies *himself*—recalls that creation is already a manifestation of God. Abraham's description of Christ's occupation simultaneously evokes the Incarnation as a divine habitation in the flesh (indeed, the angel Gabriel informs Mary that Jesus "moste iouke [i.e. dwell or 'take up space'] in hir chamber," B.16.92), anticipates the Samaritan's image of the Trinitarian grip that encompasses all of creation, and predicts the coming of Christ as conqueror and "kyng" in B.18. Like "ocupien," the language of "issue" and "springen" describes divine generativity in dynamic terms, as emanative, expansive, teeming, and perpetual. Indeed, in a formal manifestation of God's proliferative force, Abraham embeds another trinity within his primary analogy when he describes Christ's "issue" as "children of charite," and names "Holi Chirche þe moder" (B.16.197). In this manner, Christ's occupation imparts to humankind the source of Trinitarian fecundity—"charite"—and a means for its perpetuation in the institution of Holy Church.

As if from the seed of this embedded trinity, Abraham's first analogy expands into a second, which elaborates his initial notion of divine

⁶⁷ MED, s.v. "ocupien," v. 1–7, 9a., 10.

generativity with another analogy based upon the three grades of chastity: marriage, widowhood, and virginity. “[M]anhode,” or the human condition, demonstrates the basis of the Trinity, Abraham claims, for persons conforming to each of the three grades of chastity all issue from one common ancestor, “Adam, oure aller fader,” through the assistance of Eve, who “was of hymselfe,” just as, above, Holy Church and all her children issue from the one God through his son Christ’s instrumental mediation (B.16.202, 205):

Wedlok and widwehode wiþ virginite ynempned,
 In tokenynge of þe Trinite was taken out of o man—
 Adam, oure aller fader; Eue was of hymselfe,
 And þe issue þat þei hadde, it was of hem boþe,
 And eijer is oþeres ioye in þre sundry persones,
 And in heuene and here oon singuler name.
 And þus is mankynde or manhede of matrimoyne yspronge,
 And bitokneþ þe Trinite and trewe bileue. (B.16.203–10)

While celebrating all three grades of chastity, Abraham locates the power of generation in “wedlok.” Here we might observe that the procreative language of Abraham’s first analogy not only becomes more overt in the second analogy, but also more systematic, its energies now channeled through the institution of marriage. By using procreative metaphors to describe the operations of the Trinity, Langland shifts “generacion” into a sacred realm. As M. Teresa Tavormina observes, in Abraham’s analogy matrimony “is presented as a reflection of the Trinity itself within humankind.”⁶⁸ Married couples, like Adam and Eve, emulate the fecundity of God the Father. Eve issues from Adam when God creates her out of Adam’s side, and then through marriage the two together produce the offspring that populates the earth. “Might is in matrimoyne, þat multipliþ þe erþe,/ And bitokneþ trewely, telle if I dorste,/ He þat first formed al, þe Fader of heuene,” Abraham explains (B.16.211–13). This image of the Father’s supreme generativity, which, like matrimony “multipliþ þe erþe” (B.16.211), recalls Wit’s introduction of Kynde as “creatour of alle kynnes bynges,/ Fader and formour of al þat euere was maked,” and defines Langland’s God as an overflowing source of creativity, a conception of the deity which the name Kynde is particularly suited to describe (B.9.26–7). By deploying the metaphor of procreation, Abraham signals God’s fecundity on three levels: Trinitarian, as the Son is begotten of the Father and the Holy Spirit proceeds (“*procedens*”) from the Father and the

⁶⁸ Tavormina, *Kindly Similitude*, p. 111, and see her extensive discussion of Abraham’s analogies in B and C, pp. 140–63.

Son; creative, as God orders the universe and “multipliþ þe erþe” with animal and human creatures (B.16.211–13); and finally, domestic, as through marriage human men and women perpetuate the procreative work of creation that mirrors God’s Trinitarian generativity.⁶⁹ By marrying and engaging in legitimate procreative practices, human beings emulate God and become direct participants in the work of *kynde*.

Given Langland’s emphasis on God’s role as creator in Abraham’s and the Samaritan’s analogies and in the examples considered throughout this chapter, it is the more startling that Kynde appears in league with Death in the poem’s final passus. In the Natura tradition, the goddess had opposed death in her life-promoting activities. Indeed, procreative sexuality, which steadily becomes Natura’s primary domain in the tradition that culminates in Chaucer’s *Parliament of Fowls*, was instituted precisely to mitigate the consequences of physical mortality. As Bernard Silvestris explains, the “two genii,” or male reproductive organs, “[c]um morte invicti pugnans, genialibus armis:/ Naturam reparans, perpetuantque genus” [fight unconquered against death with the life-giving weapons, renew our nature, and perpetuate our kind] (II.14: 161–2). In the final passus of *Piers Plowman*, however, Langland’s counterpart to Natura arrives “out of þe planetes,” bringing “his forreyours,” agents of destruction, pain, and death (B.20.80–1):

Kynde came after hym, wiþ many kene soores
As pokkes and pestilences, and muche peple shente;
So Kynde þoruȝ corrupcions kilde ful manye.
Deep cam dryuynge after and al to duste passhed
Kynge and knyghtes, kaysers and popes. (B.20.97–101)

Here Kynde *kills*, an astonishing development in light of the Samaritan’s admonition against the “unkynedeness” of murder and Wit’s foregoing characterization of Kynde as “creatour of alle kynnes þynges” and author of “lif þat ay shal laste” (B.9.26, 48). Some readers have indeed doubted whether Kynde’s final appearance in the poem should be considered continuous with the figure’s other major appearances, in which he is associated with the “Fader and formour” and “grete God þat gynnyng

⁶⁹ On the role of the feminine in Langland’s analogies, see Galloway, “Intellectual Pregnancy.” Galloway observes that Langland’s presentation of the Trinity as a generative family and, in the Samaritan’s analogy, as a laboring hand, “cultivates social awareness” (p. 137). “Langland emphasized the central role of the laity, and what are explicitly figured as passive, ‘feminine’ modes both of generativity and of its metaphorical parallels in modes of learning . . . investing his theological poetry with a strong affirmation of secular life and femininity,” Galloway argues (p. 128).

hadde neuere" (B.9.27–8). Kynde's indiscriminate destruction here suggests a natural force, like Hunger in B.6, not a loving God.

Indeed, recalling Piers's summoning of Hunger in that previous episode, Kynde materializes in B.20 in response to Conscience's call for help. As Piers, filled with pity, eventually attempts to drive Hunger away, Conscience likewise implores Kynde to cease his destruction. But as I elaborate in a fuller reading of Hunger in Chapter 4, Wit's association of God with Kynde in B.9 indicates that natural forces, like Hunger, are *aspects* of divinity, part of the cosmic system by which God keeps the universe in order.⁷⁰ As Wit explains, Kynde is "Lord of lif and of liȝt,/ of lisse and of peyne," a statement that foreshadows the narrator's final meeting with a physically brutal Kynde at the poem's conclusion (B.9.29, emphasis added).

While Wit's claims establish Kynde's troubling sponsorship of "peyne," Langland leaves it to Patience and Peace to explain why God allows humans to suffer. Both figures describe the suffering that sin engenders as an educative process, articulating what Zeeman calls the "morally and spiritually recuperative *ratio* of *kynde*."⁷¹ Human beings suffer not to "earn" heaven, but to comprehend it, as Peace exclaims:

For hadde þei wist of no wo, wele hadde þei noȝt knowen;
 For no wight woot what wele is þat neuere wo suffrede,
 Ne what is hoot hunger, þat hadde neuere defaute.
 If no nyȝt ne weere, no man, as I leeue
 Sholde wite witterly what day is to meene.
 Sholde neuere riȝt riche man þat lyueþ in reste and ese
 Wite what wo is, ne were þe deep of kynde. (B.18.205–11)

According to Peace's account, although God did not compel sin, he allowed or "suffred" it because he understands that it is, as White observes, "a most effective instrument, perhaps indeed *the* most effective, for urging man towards his salvation."⁷² Here Peace articulates the rationale of knowledge through opposition that underlies her theodicy:

⁷⁰ In "Nature of Need," Mann describes the figure Need (B.20) as another manifestation of Hunger (B.6) and both as principles that God "built into" the created order (p. 13). Going further, she argues that need is a condition that God experiences in *Piers Plowman*. God's own need, which manifests as Christ's "thirst" for souls in B.18, is the basis of Langland's soteriology (pp. 26–8).

⁷¹ Zeeman, "Condition of Kynde," p. 24. Zeeman expands her discussion of *kynde* and lack in *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, especially pp. 157–244. On experience as "an aid to spiritual progress," see also earlier studies by Davlin, "Kynde Knowynge as a Major Theme" and White, *Nature and Salvation*, especially pp. 41–59 and 78–84.

⁷² White, *Nature and Salvation*, p. 59.

For til modicum mete with vs, I may it wel auowe,
 Woot no wight, as I wene, what is ynoz to mene.
 Forþi God, of his goodnesse, þe firste gome Adam,
 Sette hym in solace and in souereyn murþe;
 And siþþe he suffred hym synne, sorwe to feele—
 To wite what wele was, kyndeliche to knowe it. (B.18.215–20)

After first establishing Adam in the “solace” and “souereyn murþe” of Eden, God arranged for Adam—and through him, all of humankind—to experience the “sorwe” of sin and suffering. But like the “riche man þat lyueþ in reste and ese,” or like Adam in his “souereyn murþe,” God also recognizes his own need to know adversity—that is, the human condition—in order fully to comprehend his own “wele,” or, in Abraham’s earlier formulation, “his owene myzte to knowe” (B.16.192).⁷³ Though historically subsequent to Adam’s sin, the Incarnation is not, Peace implies, merely contingent upon human sin, a kind of last ditch effort to make creation right again. According to Peace’s narrative, a vision that coincides with the incarnational focus of late medieval religious thought and suggests the doctrine of Christ’s absolute predestination that Grosseteste espoused, Christ’s Incarnation is the central event of salvation history, the moment toward which all prior events point. In the lines quoted above, the phrase “of his goodnesse” applies to both of God’s actions: because “of his goodnesse,” he creates Adam in a state of bliss *and* subsequently allows him to sin and to die (B.18.218). The “deep of kynde,” a natural and inevitable part of human existence, epitomizes the balance of opposites that characterizes the created order. Life meets death, as day resolves into night, and it is through absence and lack—and specifically, the threat of death’s approach—that human beings, those who are “riche” with life, come to recognize their true condition as mortal.

Kynde’s association with Death in the final passus can be explained, then, with reference to the poem’s overarching association of *kynde* and suffering, what Zeeman calls the “needy order of things.”⁷⁴ Nevertheless, accounts of the privative aspects of *kynde* leave unexplored the ways in which Kynde’s appearance in the final passus develops the figure’s earlier representation of divine generativity, the life-giving fullness that subtends creation. Indeed, in pointing back to Patience’s sermon in B.14, the conclusion of Peace’s speech in B.18 anticipates the final appearance of Kynde. For inasmuch as Peace describes suffering as a necessary aspect of creaturely life, she also teaches that the creator’s regard for balance

⁷³ On the relationship between God’s “need” for knowledge and the Incarnation, see Davlin, “*Kynde Knowyng* as a Major Theme,” and Mann, “Eating and Drinking” and “Nature of Need.”

⁷⁴ Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, p. 240.

promises to provide eventual recompense for suffering. In the poem's conclusion, Kynde represents redress but also empowers human beings to take action now rather than waiting for God's final restoration of order, a call to participation in the work of *kynde* that I will address in the following chapters of this study.

Before turning to Kynde's final appearance, we need to examine further the terms in which Peace and Patience predict the cessation of suffering. Against the opinions of her sisters Righteousnesse and Truth, Peace argues that those who are imprisoned in hell are not damned eternally, but can look forward to a reprieve, as Patience had earlier promised Haukyn that all those who live lives of patient poverty may rightly claim "allowaunce" from God upon their deaths (B.14.109). As previously in Wit's description of Kynde's creation of the human body through a "witty" balancing of elements, and in the Vision of Kynde, where the narrator beholds the balanced coexistence of "pouerte and plentee," "pees and werre," "blisse and bale," in Patience's description God once again comprises contraries. In the changing of the seasons, Patience claims, the natural world testifies to the equilibrium characteristic of God's order. Although the beasts of creation must suffer "þoruȝ wyntres," afterwards God sends them "somer" (B.14.112, 114). This alternation of joy and sorrow, and the principle of eventual recompense for suffering, is a law of nature, as Patience contends:

Thanne may beggeris, as beestes, after boote waiten,
 That al hir lif han lyued in langour and in defaute.
 But God sente hem som tyme som manere ioye
 Ouþer here or elliswhere, kynde wolde it nere;
 For to wrotherhele was he wroȝt that neuere was joye shapen!
 (B.14.116–20)

This passage bears a complicated relationship to the appearance of Kynde elsewhere in the poem, for although the verb "wolde" ascribes volition or intent to the noun "kynde," suggesting an instance of personification, the term now stands apart from God, whose name is evoked in apparent opposition to "kynde" in the previous line. Indeed, the conditional expression that begins "[b]ut God" and concludes "kynde wolde" gestures toward what is for Patience the startling and virtually unimaginable possibility that God and "kynde" could be at odds. Ultimately, Patience insists that such a situation—a universe in which God and "kynde" did not accord—would be a contradiction. The structure of the lines, and their insistent tone, imply that if there is any subordination, it is God who must obey the "lawe of kynde," to act according to what "kynde wolde" (B.14.119).⁷⁵ And yet

⁷⁵ Langland's formulation of this problem may allude to the thirteenth-century scholastic distinction between God's *potentia absoluta* and his *potentia ordinata*, terms that

this opening of a space between God and kynde admits some doubt about God's eventual course of action, its hopeful expression of God's mercy notwithstanding. Patience admits that we cannot know with certainty that God will give "beggeris, as beestes . . . som manere ioye" in recompense for suffering; however, if God did not finally balance suffering with joy, either "here or elliswhere," his omission would contradict the very order of "kynde" that God himself created: "kynde wolde it neuere" (B.14.119). God would cease to follow the system of laws that he instituted as the basis of the created order, and for Patience, this contradiction is virtually unthinkable, for it would mean that God, who "wroȝt" human life, made it only "to wrotherhele," that is, merely for destruction. In presenting the possibility of a disjunction between God and "kynde," this passage underscores Langland's insistence throughout the poem that God and the natural order *are* in accord and that because creation is an expression of God, it provides a means for human beings to know their creator and his laws.

Thus while Langland confronts the problem of sin and suffering throughout the poem, the possibility that man might be condemned "to wrotherhele" is not finally a satisfactory answer.⁷⁶ Recuperative readings of suffering reveal its spiritual purpose, demonstrating that Langland represents suffering as educative, as part of the *kynde* order of things, an

remained a subject of debate through the fifteenth century and were central to Ockham's writings on necessity and contingency. According to this view, while God's absolute freedom of will is theoretically unconstrained, God will voluntarily act in keeping with the covenant, or system of laws, which he has ordained. On the development of this distinction see Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1967), especially pp. 30–56, and William J. Courtenay, "The Dialectic of Divine Omnipotence," reprinted in *Covenant and Causality in Medieval Thought: Studies in Philosophy, Theology and Economic Practice* (London: Variorum, 1984), and *Capacity and Volition: A History of the Distinction of Absolute and Ordained Power* (Bergamo: Perluigi Lubrina, 1990). Langland's engagement with nominalist or "semi-Pelagian" theology remains a subject of debate. Janet Coleman, *Piers Plowman and the Moderni* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1981) argues that Langland's "lawe of kynde" refers to the two *potentiae* and, on that basis, associates Langland's theology with semi-Pelagianism, but see, recently, Aers, *Salvation and Sin*, which presents a powerful case against Langland's investment in Ockhamist views of natural capacity. While a full engagement with the terms of nominalism is beyond the scope of this study, my claims support the view that Langland's assessment of natural capacity is a positive one; however, my reading of Kynde suggests a view of the relationship of divinity and nature that sharply differs from that of Ockham and his followers, whose distinctions of the two *potentiae* sought to separate the order of nature from the mystery of divine prerogative.

⁷⁶ See White's argument in *Nature and Salvation* that by associating God and nature so closely in the figure Kynde Langland necessarily implicates God in the "problem of natural evil" (pp. 67–8, 78–84). "When there is no available space between God and Nature in which God can be imagined working out his benign purposes in possibly rather mysterious ways, the question of justifying evil apparent in the natural realm is much more pressing," White observes (p. 67).

arrangement in which God suffers, too, first when he observes the sinfulness and destruction of his creation and, later, when as Christ he experiences first-hand what it means to suffer in human terms and, in doing so, ultimately initiates the end of suffering.

In a series of complaints that recalls the opening lines of Alan of Lille's *De planctu Naturae*, Kynde is evoked three times in the poem's final passus, twice by Conscience and once by Will, each time in hopes that Kynde will restore balance to a world gone mad. Kynde first appears in B.20 in response to Conscience's desperate plea that all true believers should seek refuge from Antichrist within the protective walls of Unity, or Holy Church. There, Conscience says, "crye we to Kynde þat he come and defende vs" (B.20.74). Kynde's depredations follow, until Conscience "of his curteisie" seeks a reprieve from suffering in order to assess whether it has proved spiritually ameliorative. As previously on Piers' half-acre, however, as soon as conditions are favorable again, the people resume their slide into sinfulness and Conscience summons Elde, one of Kynde's fearsome agents, in hopes of spurring the people into repentance. Even Will himself suffers the ill effects of old age, notably the loss of his hair, dashed off as Elde grazes his head in pursuit of the recalcitrant reveler Lyf. Enduring further the loss of his hearing, teeth, and sexual potency, Will in his wretchedness cries out to Kynde, invoking the figure for the second time in this passus. Kynde advises Will to follow Conscience's directions to Unity and remain there practicing the craft of love until he sends for him: "'Lerne to loue,' quod Kynde, 'and leef alle opere . . . And þow loue lelly, lakke shal þee neuere/ Weede ne worldly mete, while þi lif lasteþ'" (B.20.208, 210). This interaction is the narrator's only direct, spoken exchange with Kynde in the poem, a signal of the importance of the occasion. Kynde's instructions suggest that the proper human response to the privations of *kynde* can and must be modeled on God's fullness as nature's creator. Love is the craft that "defend[s]" against "lakke."

Both Will and Conscience, however, ask Kynde to do more than protect them, and in closing this chapter, I want to suggest that the specific terms they use to articulate their pleas call up Kynde's association with balance throughout the poem and, in doing so, gesture away from the privation that surrounds them to the plenitude that subtends *kynde*. In a moment of crisis, Will implores Kynde to "[a]wreke" him (B.20.203) and, in the poem's final lines, the passus's third apostrophe to Kynde, Conscience likewise begs Kynde to "avenge" him (B.20.385). Both figures apparently understand Kynde as an agent of retribution or vengeance, and his ruthless exploits with Death and Elde seem indeed to validate such a view. Both appeals again recall Piers's angry "houp" for Hunger in B.6: "Awreke me of þese wastours . . . þat þis world shendeþ" (B.6.172-3).

Although he eventually takes pity on Hunger's victims, in crying out for vengeance Piers indeed *intends* harm, threatening to "apeire" the wasters who flout his and the knight's authority alike (B.6.171). Hunger's appearance is a manifestation of retributive justice, a commensurate punishment for wrongdoing. But the context of Will's and Conscience's appeals suggests that in the poem's final passus Langland has a somewhat different sort of retribution in mind, one meant not to punish wrongdoers but to restore balance on other terms. Just after Will's encounter with Kynde, Conscience evokes Kynde as the custodian of universal order. Here Conscience turns his critique toward the friars who run rampant among the people, seeking "for coueitse to haue cure of soules" (B.20.233):

And if ye coueite cure, Kynde wol yow telle
 That in mesure God made alle manere þynges,
 And sette it at a certain and at a siker nombre,
 And nempnede hem names newe, and noumbrede þe sterres:
Qui numerat multitudinem stellarum. (B.20.253–6a)

As in Patience's speech, Conscience allows some separation between Kynde—a representative of natural order, who *tells* of God's institution of "mesure"—and God the Creator. Nevertheless, Conscience's description assumes a correlation between nature's order and God's will. This idea of measure and right order is, I propose, precisely what Conscience and Will desire when they cry out for vengeance. Setting out in the poem's final lines to seek Piers Plowman, Conscience calls on Kynde to "sende [him] hap and heele" (B.20.386). He asks Kynde, in other words, to offset the privations we have witnessed in the foregoing passus.

As on the half-acre, when the initially brutal Hunger becomes an advocate for charity, here, too, Langland suggests that the solution to *kynde* suffering is not more suffering—vengeance in the usual sense—but a balancing act that enlists human cooperation to fulfill the promise of God's order. Kynde's answer to Will's plea, like Hunger's eventual advice to Piers, is to meet "lakke" with love, its own form of restorative "vengeance." Kynde's command suggests that even as they are subject to sin, lack, and death, human beings are tasked with practicing the craft of love, that, indeed, the plenitude that subtends creation remains *accessible* to human life through loving. The poem ends as Conscience's appeal to Kynde becomes a cry for grace—"he gradde after Grace" (B.20.387)—giving name to the redressive plenitude that he seeks. Although the shift from Kynde to Grace seems abrupt, it is in fact consistent with Langland's representation of Kynde as creator throughout the poem. Nature points toward grace not only because natural experience makes human beings suffer and seek out amelioration, but because nature itself is the product of

God's grace, the manifestation of God's expansive love and a promise that even the postlapsarian realm of *kynde* is not consigned to privation.

In this chapter I have aimed to describe the qualities that define Langland's God as Kynde, a project that has required us to look beyond the three major appearances of Kynde to consider God's triune multidimensionality, the subject of a series of imaginative, and often enigmatic, Trinitarian analogies presented in the poem. In his appearances as Kynde, Langland's God is fundamentally a creator and source of life and, moreover, he is a creator on intimate terms with his creation, both in his active and careful shaping of the human body and his direct experience of created existence as Christ when he takes "Adames kynde" (B.18.221). God's involvement with his creation is finally shown to result from what I have described as his "heaviness" or "fullness," an image we find in Holy Church's discussion of Love's fall from heaven and the Samaritan's notion of the Trinitarian hand that represents "a ful God" who holds all of creation within himself. God's fullness, far from satiating, demands material expression as, paradoxically, God releases into existence all that he holds within himself and then, as it were, chases after it again as Christ. Finally recasting the theophanies of the Natura allegories as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God's triune constitution in *Piers Plowman* presents the model and the source of all creation, the abundance that issues forth from the creator Kynde to produce the *kynde* creation. The following chapters address questions that arise from Langland's bold redefinition of the relationship between God and nature, in particular, the epistemological and ethical implications of living in a world suffused by the presence of its creator and his command to love.

3

“Diuerse siztes”

Encyclopedism and Interpretation in *Piers Plowman*

[I]nvisibilia enim ipsius a creatura mundi per ea quae facta sunt.
[For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are
clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.]

Romans 1: 20

Omnis mundi creatura/ Quasi liber et pictura/ Nobis est et speculum.
[Every creature of the world is like a book and picture and mirror
to us.]

Alan of Lille, *Rhythmus alter*¹

The description of Kynde's intimacy with creation in the previous chapter suggests Langland's confidence in the created world as a place to discover spiritual truths. The value of natural knowledge is directly at issue in B.11 when Kynde sets the narrator “on a mountaigne þat Myddelerþe hizte,” affording him a perspective from which he might survey all of creation at once (B.11.323).² As the narrator understands it, he is meant to use the natural world as a repository of lessons that will lead him to love of God: “I was fet forþ by ensaumples to knowe,/ Thoruȝ ech a creature, Kynde my creatour to louye” (B.11.324–5). Such a description aligns the Vision of Kynde with the Latin tradition of exemplarist contemplation and the related metaphor of the *liber* or *speculum naturae*.³ Exemplarism is

¹ Alan of Lille, *Rhythmus alter*, PL 210, 579A.

² This synoptic vision is very like that experienced by Troilus and refused by the narrator of the *House of Fame*, recalling as well the heavenly voyages of Scipio and Natura herself in the Charrtian allegories. Although the narrator lists “þe sonne and þe see and þe sond” and later “þe sterres” in his catalog of sights (B.11.326, 362), like the opening vision of the “fair feelð ful of folk” (B.Pr.17), the Vision of Kynde is overwhelmingly focused on the earthly domain.

³ Clopper presents a chapter on “Langland's Exemplarism” in “*Songes of Rechelesnesse*,” pp. 105–44. His study does not focus on Langland's engagement with the natural world but on his Trinitarian theology and its connections to Bonaventure's exemplarist philosophy. See also Joseph S. Wittig, “*Piers Plowman* B, Passūs IX–XII: Elements in the Design of the

a symbolic understanding of nature rooted in Augustine's theory of signs in the *De doctrina christiana*, developed in the Neoplatonic nature allegories of Chartres and the meditations of the Victorines, and fully systematized by Bonaventure in the thirteenth century. It proposes that the created world, like a book written by God, bears the imprint of its creator and that human beings have the capacity to "read" or see spiritual lessons "reflected" in nature.⁴ As a "book" written in God's own hand, the natural world comprised a testament parallel to the revealed truths of scripture: natural facts, understood as signs of spiritual things, provide a treasury of phenomena that preachers and theologians used to illustrate moral teachings.⁵ Like a "mirror," nature could reflect back models of good and bad behavior to human observers. Even more fundamentally, the book of nature was presumed to reveal the traits of its creator. If God is the exemplar, then the *liber naturae* resembles its creator, and each of its component parts, "ech a creature," as Langland puts it in B.11, might be viewed as individual exempla, or "ensaumples," leading back to God (B.11.324).

But the broader philosophical and theological concept of exemplarism, as distinguished from the genre of the exemplum, posits a fundamental and universal relationship between created things and spiritual truths, not only an incidental or rhetorically useful one.⁶ As such,

Inward Journey," *Traditio* 28 (1972): pp. 211–80, and David Strong, "Illumination of the Intellect: Franciscan Sermons and *Piers Plowman*," in *Speculum Sermonis: Interdisciplinary Reflections on the Medieval Sermon*, ed. Georgiana Donavin, Cary J. Nederman, and Richard Utz (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), pp. 197–220. Both Wittig and Strong understand the Vision of Kynde, and the poem more generally, to be indebted to twelfth-century monastic discourses, including Bonaventuran exemplarism. My argument disagrees, however, with Strong's claim that "[f]rom this meeting [with Kynde], we learn that any creature, no matter how far removed from the hierarchy of humanity, capably directs the individual's mind to God" (p. 211). Ascent to knowledge of God is indeed the stated goal of the vision in B.11, but my aim in this chapter is to show that it is not achieved as readily as Strong suggests.

⁴ On the idea of the "book of nature," see Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, pp. 319–26 and Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book*, pp. 29–50, and see my discussion of the trope as a framework for reading *Piers Plowman* in this book's Preface and Introduction. On the "mirror of nature," see Ritamary Bradley, "Backgrounds of the Title *Speculum* in Medieval Literature," *Speculum* 29 (1954): pp. 100–15. The connection is even more pronounced in the C-text where Kynde directs Rechelesnesse, who now takes the narrator's role, to look into "the myrour of Mydelethe" rather than placing him on a mountain of that name. This change is particularly suggestive since a *speculum*, or mirror, was a common Latin title for encyclopedic texts, which were at once the product and the tools of exemplarist endeavors.

⁵ On the use of natural lore as sermon exempla, and particularly that concerning animal behavior, see John Morson, "The English Cistercians and the Bestiary," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 39 (1956): pp. 146–70, and G.R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 195–204.

⁶ On exempla, see Nigel F. Palmer, "Exempla," in *Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide*, ed. F.A.C. Mantello and A.G. Rigg (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1996), pp. 582–8, and Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power:*

exemplarism offers a confident appraisal of the spiritual value of nature, but also places strict conditions on how the physical world may be apprehended and used. Hugh of St. Victor makes this point in his famous expression of the trope of the book of nature:

Vniuersus enim mundus iste sensibilis quasi quidam liber est scriptus digito Dei, hoc est uirtute diuina creatus, et singulae creaturae quasi figurae quaedam sunt, *non humano placito inuentae, sed diuino arbitrio institutae* ad manifestandam et quasi quodammodo significandam inuisibilem Dei sapientiam. (4.94–8, emphasis added)⁷

[For the whole sensible world is a kind of book written by the finger of God, that is, created by divine power, and each creature is a kind of figure, not contrived by human convention, but established by the divine will to manifest and in some measure to signify the invisible wisdom of God.]

The figural significances of “singulae creaturae” are in this view divinely instituted and discoverable in nature by human interpreters, not merely ingenious narratives invented by clever bestiarists. In what follows, I will argue that Langland’s treatment of nature largely conforms to this symbolic and sacramental view while emphasizing the human interpreter’s role, an argument that develops this book’s larger theme that poetry gives form to, or, in a more Langlandian idiom, “cultivates” the bare potential of nature.

At the outset, the Vision of Kynde is marked as an exemplarist meditation, and its placement within the narrator’s quest for “kynde knowynge” highlights Langland’s interest in exploring natural and experiential modes of knowledge.⁸ However, as James Simpson has observed, in these central

The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Although exempla were not always used out of context, Palmer points out that the existence of exempla collections can serve to undermine the form’s claims to truth: “When the exemplum is seen in the context of a collection, the unidirectional thrust towards a particular lesson is counteracted by the wealth of diverse (and potentially contradictory) doctrine contained in the whole . . . Such works implicitly question the idea that an exemplum can form a compelling basis for a particular course of action: and so the literary form turns, playfully, against itself” (pp. 584–5). Similarly, Chenu, *Nature, Man, Society*, remarks on the distinction between exempla and exemplarism: “To be sure, in *exemplum* literature, as in the rhetoric taught by the *artes praedicandi* (arts of preaching), symbols were readily used as illustrations for Christian values. But in the twelfth century especially, the symbol . . . was treated as an instrument capable of penetrating truth, over and beyond any brief and incidental use in mere illustration” (p. 112).

⁷ *De tribus diebus*, ed. Dominic Poirel, CCCM 177 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001). Translations my own in consultation with *Trinity and Creation: A Selection of Works of Hugh, Richard and Adam of St. Victor*, ed. Boyd Taylor Coolman and Dale M. Coulter (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2011).

⁸ On the association of “kynde knowynge” and experiential knowledge see Davlin, “*Kynde Knowynge* as a Major Theme”; Mann, “Eating and Drinking”; Simpson, “From

passūs of the poem, Langland's investigation of theological questions often "subverts the literary and academic forms it apparently adopts."⁹ In this chapter, I propose the Vision of Kynde and its surrounding passūs as another instance in which Langland exposes the limitations of an authoritative discourse. While the Vision of Kynde evokes the Latin tradition of exemplarist contemplation and its promise of the authoritative, integrated knowledge that Kynde offers, it finally disrupts the pattern of that form by concluding not with praise of nature's creator, but in a critique of the order of nature itself. As a result, the narrator wakes from his inner dream angry and ashamed, the chance for spiritual enlightenment apparently lost.

This chapter is in part an attempt to explain the staged failure of exemplarism in the Vision of Kynde. To answer this question, we must examine Langland's regard for nature as an object of knowledge as well as the narrator's qualities as a knowing subject. We must also query the status of "failure" in the poem more broadly. In an immediate sense, the vision falls short of its exemplarist goals, but its success need not depend on a straight line from observations of "ech a creature" to love of their creator. Situated in a portion of the poem that has been described as "a journey of the mind into itself," the Vision of Kynde is framed by a series of passūs in which the narrator meets allegorical aspects of his own psyche: Thought, Wit, Inwit, Imaginatif, and even Anima, as well as Study and Clergy, personifications of the mind's cognitive activities and the academic institutions that shape them.¹⁰ A now conventional way of reading these passūs traces in Will's journey a model of cognitive and spiritual ascent from *scientia* to *sapientia*, a transition from an intellective to an affective orientation toward knowledge.¹¹ Commentators have observed that the

Reason to Affective Knowledge: Modes of Thought and Poetic Form in *Piers Plowman*," *Medium Aevum* 55 (1986): pp. 1–23; White, *Nature and Salvation*, pp. 41–59; and Zeeman, "'Studying' in the Middle Ages," 185–212, "The Condition of Kynde," and *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, pp. 201–44.

⁹ Simpson, *Piers Plowman: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007), p. 113, and see his more detailed analysis of the poem's shifting cognitive modes in Simpson, "From Reason to Affective Knowledge." Simpson shows this tendency at work in B.2–4 as well, where Langland uses economic language derived from the money economy he elsewhere deplores in order to explore spiritual relationships. See "Spirituality and Economics in Passus 1–7 of the B Text," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 1 (1987): pp. 83–103.

¹⁰ See Morton W. Bloomfield, *Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1962), p. 64; Wittig, "Inward Journey"; Simpson, "From Reason to Affective Knowledge"; and Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*.

¹¹ See Davlin, "Kynde Knowynge as a Major Theme"; Wittig, "Inward Journey"; Carruthers, *The Search for St. Truth* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973); Davlin, "Kynde Knowynge as a Middle English Equivalent for 'Wisdom' in *Piers Plowman B*," *Medium Aevum* 50 (1981): pp. 5–18; and Simpson, "From Reason to

Vision of Kynde is one in a series of “stumblings” carefully staged by the poet to depict a soul’s progress toward wisdom and self-discovery.¹² As Simpson writes, “movement in the poem is produced out of epistemological or cognitive limitations.”¹³ The frustrated “will to know” is in fact the very engine that drives the poem, propelling Will the narrator from one interlocutor and from one cognitive model to another, though not necessarily, as Nicolette Zeeman has observed, in a linear or progressive fashion.¹⁴ My interest then in the “failure” of the Vision of Kynde remains local: given the special value of *kynde* as a principle uniting creator and creation throughout the poem, why on this occasion does Langland insist on nature’s jarring illegibility and the virtual—and for the narrator, keenly felt—exclusion of its human observers?

This chapter proposes that Langland assesses the potential of nature as a site for spiritual knowledge on two fronts: first, how one apprehends nature and second, what use one makes of it. In his efforts to discover truth through accumulated experiences and observations, a strategy embodied by his wish to “lyue and loke . . . [and] go lerne better” (B.8.58), the narrator voices what I will call an “encyclopedic” approach to nature.¹⁵ This is a term by which I mean to characterize observations motivated by a desire to collect and compile, anatomize and distinguish the “diuerse siztes” of natural experience (B.12.136). Encyclopedic looking, in contrast to exemplarist contemplation, fractures the world even as encyclopedic projects purport to be comprehensive or “encircling,” as the Greek root of the term suggests. *Piers Plowman* is encyclopedic in conception: its organization around *passūs* reflects at the formal level its recurring tropes of “going wide” and gathering observations. Even several *passūs* after his encounter

Affective Knowledge,” and “The Role of *Scientia* in *Piers Plowman*” in *Medieval English Religious and Ethical Literature: Essays in Honour of G.H. Russell*, ed. Kratzmann and Simpson (Cambridge: Brewer, 1986), pp. 49–65.

¹² Wittig, “Inward Journey,” p. 280.

¹³ Simpson, “From Reason to Affective Knowledge,” p. 2.

¹⁴ Zeeman’s *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire* offers the most recent and thorough account of the vital “dynamic of failure, rebuke, and renewal” that drives the poem, but she disagrees with the “progress” model that suggests linear or hierarchical movement from lower to higher cognitive modes. Critiquing the tendency of readings like Wittig’s and Simpson’s to chart the movement of these *passūs* in “exclusively positive terms,” Zeeman insists that “what appears to be progress always leads directly back to reiterative experiences of failure, rebuke and loss” (pp. 20, 18). See also Middleton’s seminal study of the poem’s recursive form, “Narration and the Invention of Experience.”

¹⁵ Many commentators have noted the narrator’s boundless desire to collect data. Middleton (“Kynde Name,” p. 45) describes “Will’s ambitious ransacking of the world for intricate answers to increasingly subdivided questions,” and Davlin (“Kynde Knowyng as a Major Theme,” p. 5) aligns the narrator’s goal with the “detached, objective knowledge of the encyclopedist.” No one has yet, to my knowledge, suggested that Langland is specifically drawing on encyclopedic discourses in this section of the poem.

with Kynde, the narrator declares his abiding encyclopedic desire to Anima: "*Alle þe sciences vnder sonne and alle þe sotile craftes/ I wolde I knewe and kouþe kyndely in myn herte!*" (B.15.48–9, emphasis added). The narrator's quest for knowledge drives the narrative, but it is insistently expressed in encyclopedic terms in B.8–15, the portion of the poem in which he begins to converse with worldly interlocutors, learns about the Castle of Kynde and its physical and cognitive capacities, and experiences life in and through that body.

Given the narrator's self-professed "[c]oueitise to konne and to knowe science,"¹⁶ it is tempting to understand these passūs as functioning to expose and to amend his acquisitive orientation toward knowledge, his materialism having hindered his ability to "read" spiritual truths in nature (B.15.62). In this view, the "failure" of the Vision of Kynde would be easy to explain and would pose less of a threat to the discourse of exemplarism, whose profits have always eluded the "vir insipiens" [foolish man], as Hugh of St. Victor warns.¹⁷ But even within the prevailing interpretation of the "inner journey" as a transition from cognitive to affective modes of knowing, from greedy accumulation to patient suffering, I want to suggest there is room for another reading that does not negate the value of encyclopedism, a habit of mind Langland apparently shares with the narrator as evidenced by his deployment of encyclopedic source material throughout these passūs. In particular, I will suggest that these passūs stage a conflict between exemplarism and encyclopedism, two theories of the uses of nature that are subsets of *sapientia* and *scientia*, respectively. As we shall see, the symbolic and the scientific views of nature as they develop from the twelfth century are both encyclopedic in practice, for each orientation requires the collection and analysis of observational data. In other words, a symbolic reading of nature cannot proceed without a certain measure of encyclopedic looking. But while exemplarism submits to the authority of God as nature's creator, encyclopedism seeks an authority of its own design, a discourse composed of "diuerse siztes" of experience (B.12.136). It is precisely between these two modes of

¹⁶ This is Anima's diagnosis of Will's condition at B.15.62; yet, as I show below, Will also characterizes his own desire as "covetousness" at B.8.110 ("for more kynde knowynge I coueite to lerne"), and Fortune's opening address to him reflects this characterization at B.11.11. On the poem's association of the "unnatural sin" of covetousness with the failure of sight, see Alastair Bennett, "Covetousness, 'Unkyndenesse,' and the 'Blered' Eye in *Piers Plowman* and 'The Canon's Yeoman's Tale,'" *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 28 (2014): pp. 29–64.

¹⁷ *De tribus diebus*, 4.92. I discuss Hugh's instructive reverie before nature at length below.

reckoning with nature that Langland attempts to locate his own authority as a poetic maker.

In "Narration and the Invention of Experience," Anne Middleton compares the narrator's position vis-à-vis nature with those of the questing knight or meditative seer. "The romance hero and the subject of Latin visionary dialogues contemplate and assimilate themselves to a presented cosmic image," Middleton observes. "[T]hey do not compose a story of their quarrel with it, as finite historical beings contained by the condition of mortality."¹⁸ Langland, by contrast, stages just such a quarrel, inscribing in the figure of Will a project Middleton describes as a "poetics of interposition."¹⁹ Middleton's terminology provides a useful paradigm for this chapter, for it is precisely Langland's attempt to "combin[e] the cosmic and the personal," to interpret the human place within the larger creation, that makes the encyclopedic mode so appealing as a practice and literary form, despite its acknowledged hazards.²⁰

In considering the Vision of Kynde as expressing a failed exemplarism attributable to the narrator's encyclopedic orientation toward knowledge while simultaneously recuperating the value of encyclopedism to poetic practice, this chapter extends the previous chapter's investigation of Langland's cautious but insistent solution to the problem of natural lack.²¹ In the realms of the epistemological, the social, and the spiritual, successively at issue in the three final chapters of this study, Langland insists on the restorative agency of human action in partnership with the divine plenitude accessible through *kynde*. He insists, in other words, that human interpretive agency not only reveals but actually fulfills the potential embodied within nature.

In order to explore Langland's engagement with the created world as an object of knowledge, this chapter begins by assessing the shifting philosophies of nature that developed in the centuries following Natura's emergence in the Charrtian allegories. The remainder of the chapter then focuses on B.11, the "inner dream," in which the narrator encounters Fortune and Kynde in two parallel episodes, and B.12, where Imaginatif counsels the narrator and offers a way to salvage exemplarism in the aftermath of his encounter with Kynde. I conclude with a brief consideration of the narrator's discourse with Anima, who, in an instance of the poem's episodic structure, again scorns Will's inordinate desire for

¹⁸ Middleton, "Narration and the Invention of Experience," p. 105.

¹⁹ Middleton, "Narration and the Invention of Experience," p. 110.

²⁰ Middleton, "Narration and the Invention of Experience," p. 105.

²¹ On the association of nature and lack in *Piers Plowman*, see Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, whose claims I discuss at length in this book's Introduction and below.

“science” and redirects his proclivity for idle compilation to action in the world. In each of these episodes, Langland draws on encyclopedic texts, using them as sources and staging meditations on what it means to collect “diuerse siztes” as a means of discovering truth (B.12.136).

THE MEDIEVAL SCIENCES OF NATURE

The idea of “nature as book” gives rise to actual “books of nature” in the production of the medieval encyclopedia and related “encyclopedic” texts, including bestiaries and other textual repositories that were given a wide range of titles in the medieval period. As Michael Twomey notes: “Medieval books of encyclopedic proportions were called by Latin words *speculum*, *imago mundi*, *de proprietatibus rerum*, *de naturis rerum*, *elucidarium*, *compendium*, *thesaurus*, *liber floridus*, or their vernacular equivalents . . . suggest[ing] a cornucopia of knowledge contained between two covers.”²² Due to the overlapping nature of these genres, and their wide range of purposes, it is necessary to offer a definition of terms at the outset. I use the term “encyclopedic” to describe texts that aspire to construct inclusive visions of nature, although medieval encyclopedias often stretch beyond physical nature to embrace the whole gamut of human knowledge.²³ Bestiaries, which share information with encyclopedias, are “encyclopedic” insofar as they aim to encompass the animal world and often place human beings among the orders of living creatures.²⁴ This chapter

²² Twomey, “Towards a Reception History of Western Medieval Encyclopedias in England before 1500,” in *Pre-Modern Encyclopedic Texts: Proceedings of the Second COMERS Congress, Groningen, 1–4 July 1998*, ed. Peter Binkley (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 329–62. Robert L. Fowler addresses the difficulty of defining a medieval encyclopedic genre in his essay, “Encyclopedias: Definitions and Theoretical Problems,” in *Pre-Modern Encyclopedic Texts*, ed. Binkley, pp. 3–29. See also Mary Franklin-Brown, *Reading the World: Encyclopedic Writing in the Scholastic Age* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2012). Brown’s study of thirteenth-century encyclopedic texts offers a capacious new definition of encyclopedism as a discursive practice, a product of rhetoric as much as natural philosophy. Her notion of an “encyclopedic subject,” which is “not uniform, but rather composite and chameleon, not fixed but ever in the act of becoming,” suggests a promising model for encyclopedism in *Piers Plowman* (p. 264).

²³ Christel Meier defines eight types of medieval encyclopedias based on their function. See Meier, “Organisation of Knowledge and Encyclopaedic *Ordo*: Functions and Purposes of a Universal Literary Genre,” in *Pre-Modern Encyclopedic Texts*, ed. Binkley, pp. 103–26. The classic study of medieval systematizing is C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964).

²⁴ See Dorothy Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 12–33. Yamamoto’s introductory chapter argues that the omission of or disregard for bestiary accounts of human creation, by both its medieval and modern curators, has had the unfortunate effect of “‘clos[ing] off’ the

considers animal lore both from bestiaires and from encyclopedias proper, as well as from other types of beast literature.²⁵ Finally, I refer to all texts that consider nature symbolically as “exemplarist.” Encyclopedias, broadly conceived, serve as tools for the exemplarist project by rendering the variety and order of creation accessible to human understanding through observation, compilation, and classification. As these activities suggest, however, the symbolic view of nature, in which the natural world is meaningful only as a sign of higher things, was not the only way to regard nature in the Middle Ages. Instead, encyclopedic compendia fall somewhere along a spectrum of views that range from Augustinian, or Neoplatonic, to Aristotelian. Exemplarist undertakings are necessarily encyclopedic, in the sense that the contemplative observer must gather sensory data for symbolic interpretation, but not all encyclopedias are exemplarist, depending on their attitude toward the material they set out. Although it is often difficult to draw firm lines of distinction between exemplarist and encyclopedic projects, the tension between these two visions of natural knowledge and the texts that they produced—from Neoplatonic allegories like Alan’s *De planctu* to proto-scientific encyclopedias and moralized bestiaires—are vital contexts for understanding Langland’s inquiries in B.11 and 12 and in his encounter with Anima in B.15.

In *De doctrina christiana*, Augustine establishes a semiotics of nature based on the Neoplatonic notion that the sensible world has value only as a sign of higher things:

[S]ic in huius mortalitatis vita peregrinantes a domino, si redire in patriam volumus ubi beati esse possimus, utendum est hoc mundo, non fruendum, ut *invisibilia dei per ea quae facta sunt intellecta* conspiciantur, hoc est ut de corporalibus temporalibusque rebus aeterna et spiritualia capiamus.²⁶

[So in this mortal life we are travelers away from our Lord: if we wish to return to the homeland where we can be happy we must use this world, not enjoy it, in order to discern “the invisible attributes of God, which are

Bestiary text as a straightforward catalogue of animals.” Instead, Yamamoto argues, “[w]e need to re-complicate it, to treat it as the focus for questions about the whole relationship between humans and the rest of creation” (p. 18).

²⁵ Two essential introductions to the development of the bestiary tradition are Florence McCulloch, *Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1960) and Willene B. Clark, ed. and trans., *A Medieval Book of Beasts* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006). See also Debra Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and Nona Flores, *Animals in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2000). On the representation of animals in other genres of beast literature and their relationship to the bestiary tradition, see Mann, *From Aesop to Reynard*.

²⁶ Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 1.4.9, ed. and trans. R.P.H Green (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), pp. 16–17.

understood through what has been made" or, in other words, to ascertain what is eternal and spiritual from corporeal and temporal things.]

According to Augustine, the world is an object of interpretation, not a good in itself, but a means of moving on to "invisibilia," or divine truths. Citing Romans 1: 20, Augustine elaborates an exemplarist theory of the "uses" of nature based on biblical authority that would remain popular throughout the medieval period.²⁷

By contrast, Aristotle's teaching on nature sought to discover the inner causalities of sensible things through the observation of individual phenomena without reference to a hidden truth beyond the sensible world.²⁸ Aristotelian science advocates study of the natural world for its own sake and on its own terms, not merely as a sign of something else. Unlike Plato, for whom the sensible world comprises nothing but shadows of the eternal Ideas, and unlike Neoplatonists such as Augustine, for whom observation of the "visible things" of the world is a prologue to higher contemplation, Aristotle placed great value on the perceptible world and the variety of its individual manifestations.²⁹

Encyclopedic texts bear the influence both of Neoplatonic symbolism, as transmitted by Augustine, and the empiricism of Aristotelian learning. From the twelfth century onwards, the study of natural philosophy was energized by the influx of Aristotelian and Arabic texts.³⁰ But it was Augustine who had first called for the production of a Christian encyclopedia as an aid to biblical study, noting the impossibility of deciphering scripture without understanding its allusions to natural phenomena:

²⁷ On Augustine's exemplarism, see David Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought* (Baltimore, MD: Helicon Press, 1962), pp. 40–3.

²⁸ On the development of a "scientific sensibility" in relation to nature, see Stock, *Myth and Science*, and Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society*, pp. 102–19.

²⁹ Jonathan Barnes, "Metaphysics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 66–108, presents a lucid summary of Aristotle's emphasis on perceptible objects as the basis of all knowledge. For a comparison of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies of nature, see David C. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science: The European Scientific Tradition in Philosophical, Religious, and Institutional Context, 600 B.C. to A.D. 1450* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 47–54.

³⁰ C.H. Lohr summarizes the recovery of Aristotelian science and its incorporation into the schools in "The Medieval Interpretation of Aristotle," in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism 1100–1600*, ed. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 80–98. See also Knowles, *Evolution of Medieval Thought*, and Edward Grant, *God and Reason in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 83–114. On the transmission of Aristotelian science via Arabic sources, see Jean Jolivet, "The Arabic Inheritance," in *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, ed. Peter Dronke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 113–48, and Lindberg, "The Transmission of Greek and Arabic Learning to the West," in *Science in the Middle Ages*, ed. Lindberg (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1978), pp. 52–90.

“Rerum autem ignorantia facit obscuras figuratas locutiones, cum ignoramus vel animantium vel lapidum vel herbarum naturas aliarumve rerum quae plerumque in scripturis similitudinis alicuius gratia ponuntur” [Ignorance of things makes figurative expressions unclear when we are ignorant of the qualities of animals or stones or plants or other things mentioned in scripture for the sake of some analogy].³¹ Further, Augustine continues,

si quem eorum qui possunt benignam sane operam fraternae utilitati delectet impendere, ut quoscumque terrarum locos quaeue animalia vel herbas atque arbores sive lapides vel metalla incognita speciesque quaslibet scriptura commemorat ea generatim digerens sola exposita litteris mandet.³²

[if someone suitably qualified were interested in devoting a generous amount of time to the good of his brethren he could compile a monograph classifying and setting out all the places, animals, plants, and trees, or the stones and unknown metals, and all the other kinds of objects mentioned in scripture.]

Although Pliny’s *Naturalis historia* (c. 77) is considered the first Western encyclopedia, Cassiodorus’s *Institutions* (c. 562) and Isidore’s *Etymologies* (c. 636) were the first major encyclopedias produced in response to the specifically Christian need that Augustine identified, and later compendia continued to declare their purposes along these lines.³³

One such example is Bartholomaeus Anglicus’s popular encyclopedic work, *De proprietatibus rerum*. His Latin text was translated into Middle English by John Trevisa at the end of the fourteenth century and provides evidence of the currency of Augustine’s exemplarist approach to nature during the period in which Langland wrote *Piers Plowman*.³⁴ In his prologue, Bartholomaeus explains that, by the work of the Holy Spirit, divine truths have been “derkliche ihid and wrapped vndir liknes and fygures of propirtees of þinges of kynde and craft” because, Bartholomaeus

³¹ Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 2.16.59, 82–5. Lindberg discusses Augustine’s view of natural philosophy as a handmaiden to theology in “Early Christian Attitudes toward Nature,” in *Science and Religion: A Historical Introduction*, ed. Gary B. Ferngren (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), pp. 51–3.

³² Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 2.39.141, 122–3.

³³ On the development of the medieval encyclopedia, see the entry for encyclopedias in Joseph R. Strayer, ed., *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* 4 (New York: Scribner, 1982–9), pp. 447–50, and Gregory G. Guzman, “Encyclopedias,” in *Medieval Latin*, ed. Mantello and Rigg (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press), pp. 702–7.

³⁴ Trevisa’s text was complete c. 1398, but he is thought to have been working on the translation at Oxford from 1394. Even though it is unlikely that Langland ever saw Trevisa’s translation, I cite Trevisa’s Middle English text when referring to Bartholomaeus because it offers a vernacular context for comparison with Langland’s handling of similar topics.

writes, "oure wit may not stize vnto þe contemplacioun of vnseye þinges but it be ilad by consideracioun of þinges þat bep iseye."³⁵ In other words, divine truths cannot be expressed directly since immediate knowledge of such matters is beyond human cognition; therefore, scriptural texts use "fleisschliche" figures as an aid to human understanding, so that human beings might "stye vp" to divine knowledge through things that can be known and experienced.³⁶ By compiling in one place all the natures and properties of created things, the encyclopedic work constitutes an interpretive tool with which to "unwrap" the hidden meanings of scripture.

The Latin lore and learning of these texts thus made its way into the vernacular through the production of English encyclopedias—such as Trevisa's translation of Bartholomaeus—as well as through countless instances of the borrowing and adaptation of encyclopedic material in bestiaries, lapidaries, and herbals, as well as in literary texts. Chaucer, for example, borrowed from Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum maius* as well as from Bartholomaeus's encyclopedia. Bartholomaeus's enormous literary influence has been traced in such texts as *Mandeville's Travels*, Usk's *Testament of Love*, *Mum and the Sothsegger*, Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, the *Pricke of Conscience*, *Dives et Pauper*, and the *Court of Sapience*.³⁷ Many of these texts traveled in the same circles as *Piers Plowman*, either directly influenced by Langland's work or appearing in shared manuscript contexts. As I will argue below, Langland not only borrowed encyclopedic lore, like Chaucer and many of his contemporaries, but also actively engaged the mentality that produced texts of this kind.

The thirteenth century represented more than a boom in encyclopedic texts; it also revolutionized the way that accumulated knowledge was organized and exhibited. As Mary A. and Richard K. Rouse have explained, thirteenth-century developments represent a new attitude toward the way that knowledge should be deployed. "Twelfth-century scholarship is characterized by the effort to gather, organize, and harmonize the legacy of the Christian past as it pertained to jurisprudence, theological doctrine, and

³⁵ John Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus, De Proprietatibus Rerum*, prologue, lines 11–12, 18–20, ed. M.C. Seymour et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 41.

³⁶ Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, prologue, lines 16 and 26.

³⁷ See Twomey, "Towards a Reception History," pp. 359–61, and Edwards, "Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De proprietatibus rerum* and Medieval English Literature," *Archiv* 222 (1985): pp. 124–7. Pauline Aiken describes Chaucer's use of the *Speculum maius* in a series of essays including, "Vincent of Beauvais and Dame Pertelote's Knowledge of Medicine," *Speculum* 10 (1935): pp. 281–7; "Chaucer's *Legend of Cleopatra* and the *Speculum Historiale*," *Speculum* 13 (1938): 232–6; "Vincent of Beauvais and Chaucer's *Monk's Tale*," *Speculum* 17 (1942): pp. 56–68; "Vincent of Beauvais and Chaucer's Knowledge of Alchemy," *Studies in Philology* 41 (1944): pp. 371–89.

Scripture,” they write, describing the era that produced the *Decretum*, Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*, and the *Glossa ordinaria*. The great achievement of the thirteenth century was then “a new mode of scholarship characterized by the efforts to penetrate these great mosaics of the twelfth century, to gain access to the whole works of authority, and to ask fresh questions of them.”³⁸ Some of the most profound new techniques of access included the creation of a biblical concordance, developments in page layout, such as the use of rubrications and paragraph headings, and the invention of finding techniques including indices and, crucially, alphabetical ordering. These advances in the ability to manipulate knowledge in order to deploy it more efficiently arose primarily as a result of new demands. The foundation of the universities and a more general growth of schooling, the integration of Aristotelian and Arabic learning, the creation of the mendicant orders, and a resurgence of the Church’s pastoral mission, which included a new commitment to preaching, all contributed to the rising need for quick access to the wealth of knowledge that had begun to be gathered and synthesized in the preceding century.³⁹ The appearance of *distinctiones* collections, according to the Rouses, both responded to and promoted the developing genre of the thematic sermon, providing preachers with clearly organized compendia of material with which to fashion their sermons.⁴⁰ The changed attitude toward the uses of knowledge that these new technologies reveal is consonant with the notion that I have described as an “encyclopedic” mindset, an orientation toward knowledge that seeks to accumulate and digest diverse findings. “These compilations were a new kind of literature in many ways,” the Rouses argue, “not the least of which is that they are designed, not for reflective reading, but for seeking out specific information.”⁴¹

To summarize then, I suggest that the late-medieval “scientific” approach to the book of nature resembled, and was aided by, this newly “utilitarian” approach to other texts. This is not to say that the symbolic view disappeared—on the contrary, it remained lively in the contemplative and exegetical traditions and shared space with Aristotelian material in encyclopedic texts, especially the moralized compendia of natural facts, such as bestiaries and lapidaries. The new technologies of the

³⁸ Rouse and Rouse, “*Statim invenire*: Schools, Preachers, and New Attitudes to the Page,” in *Authentic Witnesses: Approaches to Medieval Texts and Manuscripts* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), p. 191.

³⁹ Rouse and Rouse, *Authentic Witnesses*, especially pp. 191–2, 205–6.

⁴⁰ Rouse and Rouse, *Authentic Witnesses*, pp. 201–2, 209–10. On Langland’s own use of *distinctiones* collections, see John Alford, “The Role of the Quotations,” *Speculum* 52 (1977), pp. 80–99; Mann, “Eating and Drinking”; and Allen, “Langland’s Reading and Writing.”

⁴¹ Rouse and Rouse, *Authentic Witnesses*, p. 197.

page, combined with the new Aristotelian science, did, however, present an alternative view of nature that would compete with the Neoplatonic vision, regarding the natural world no longer as a site for meditation on hidden truths, but as a field of knowledge to be mined, sifted, and catalogued for use.

The remainder of this chapter focuses on Langland's cautious treatment of natural knowledge and its potential as a spiritual good. Before proceeding to a closer examination of the Vision of Kynde, the site of the clash between the two views of nature I have elaborated above, I begin with the Vision of Fortune that prefaces the narrator's encounter with Kynde. In this episode, Will's appetite for knowledge, an encyclopedic desire, leaves him vulnerable to Fortune's blandishments, an experience that teaches him the dangers of too much acquaintance with the world and, crucially, if not conclusively, sets him to the task of self-scrutiny.

FORTUNE'S MIRROR: NATURE AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE

In B.10, at one of the poem's many moments of rupture, the narrator impatiently complains that Clergy and Scripture have failed to provide a satisfactory definition of Dowel. "This is a long lesson," he laments, "and litel am I þe wiser! Where Dowel is or Dobet derkliche ye shewen" (B.10.371–2). The passus then concludes with the narrator's bold indictment of learning. He cites Augustine as his authority in alleging that the *idioti*—"plowmen and pastours and pouere commune laborers,/ Souteres and shepherdes"—are "sonner ysaued" and "sadder of bileue" than "þise konnyng clerkes that knowe manye bokes" (B.10.452–65). Scripture's sharp response to Will's impudence at the beginning of the next passus—"Multi multa sciunt et seipsos nesciunt" (B.11.3)—directs him to seek self-knowledge first before passing judgments on others and making pronouncements about the way to salvation.⁴² Her criticism so disturbs the narrator that he weeps "for wo and wrape of hir speche" and falls into a

⁴² On the interrelation and interdependency of *clergie* and *scripture* on the one hand and *kynde* on the other, see Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, pp. 209–10. Wittig discusses the significance of Scripture's speech here, in particular her use of the *incipit* "Multi multa sciunt et seipsos nesciunt" (B.11.3). Langland may be quoting from the pseudo-Bernardine tract *Meditationes piissimae de cognitione humanae conditionis* (Wittig, "Inward Journey," p. 212), but this phrase also appears in the *Floretus*, a medieval school-text that would have been readily available in the fourteenth century. Alford provides a preliminary connection between the poem and the *Floretus*, citing the latter's pun on *ingratus/gratus* as inspiration for Langland's wordplay at B.14.169–70. See Alford, *Guide to the Quotations*, pp. 26–7.

deeper sleep, producing the dream-within-a-dream that composes the rest of the passus (B.11.4). Although this passus also contains the important speech of Trajan, I leave that matter for fuller discussion in this book's final two chapters and focus here on the parallel events of the inner dream, the narrator's encounters with Fortune and Kynde.⁴³ Together these paired episodes probe the relationship between self-knowledge—Scripture's imperative—and natural experience. Although these spheres are initially set into opposition as a set of mutually exclusive fields of knowledge—"multa" and "seipsos"—Langland's handling of natural experience in B.11 and 12 suggests otherwise. Far from a relationship of opposition, knowledge of the world and knowledge of the self are mutually constitutive in *Piers Plowman*: looking outward not only leads inward, but it is the only way to interpret the self, that is, to see the self in its context. This correspondence between the inner and outer spheres, between human self-knowledge and knowledge of the world, is, I argue, one of the legacies of twelfth-century humanism at the heart of Langland's theory of *kynde*. In these passūs, Langland explores the idea that man is a microcosm of the universe.

At the beginning of the inner dream Fortune "rauysse[s]" the narrator, producing a meaningful echo of the narrator's earlier charge that clerks are "yrauysshed fro þe riȝte bileue" by too much learning (B.11.7, B.10.457). Here the narrator is himself ravished for scorning the need for clergy. Fortune takes the narrator into the "lond of longynge" and offers him a "mirour þat hiȝte Middelerþe" wherein he might find the knowledge that he seeks (B.11.8–9).⁴⁴ "Here myȝtow se wondres,/ And knowe þat þow coueitest, and come þerto, paraunter," Fortune promises (B.11.10–11). Implying that she can lead him to knowledge of Dowel, Fortune deceives the narrator regarding the actual content of the knowledge that she offers, but indeed takes advantage of the narrator's previously stated covetousness—

⁴³ On the parallel status of these two passages, see Murtaugh, "*Piers Plowman*" and the *Image of God*, pp. 88–9; Simpson, "*Piers Plowman*": *An Introduction to the B-Text*, p. 118; Steven F. Kruger, "Mirrors and the Trajectory of Vision in *Piers Plowman*," *Speculum* 66 (1991): pp. 74–95; Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, pp. 208–9; and, on the relationship of Fortune and Nature more generally, Howard R. Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927) and Barbara Bartholomew, *Fortuna and Natura: A Reading of Three Chaucer Narratives* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966). I agree with Zeeman's argument that the Dream of Fortune is part of a sequence of "teachings of nature, or *kynde*," that includes Trajan's speech and the subsequent Vision of Kynde ("Condition of Kynde," p. 8).

⁴⁴ On the relationship of the "lond of longynge" to Augustine's *regio dissimilitudinis*, or "land of unlikeness," where human beings are alienated from the *imago dei*, see Wittig, "Inward Journey," pp. 232–4. Middleton explores the phrase's function as one of Langland's authorial signatures in "Kynde Name," pp. 50–1.

“more kynde knowynge I coueite to lerne” (B.8.110)—in presenting him with new objects of desire.

Flanked by the vicious trio “*Concupiscencia Carnis*,” “Coueitise of Eijze,” and “Pride of Parfit Lyuynge,” the narrator observes a mini-psychomachia as a host of allegorical figures offer him conflicting advice about the value of the lifestyle that Fortune and her friends offer him. *Concupiscencia Carnis*, or Lust, promises the narrator that he will enjoy amorous female companionship for many years to come, adding that Fortune’s “mirour” will show him “myrpes ful manye/ That leden pee wole to likynge al þi lif tyme” (B.11.20–1). Only Elde warns him that “if I mete wiþ pee,” that is, when the narrator is old, Fortune will “pee faille at þi mooste nede” (B.11.28–9). Rechelesnesse appropriately counsels the narrator to embrace his youth and follow Fortune without care for what may come. He acquiesces and for forty-five years forgets his desire to know Dowel: “Coueitise of Eijzes conforted me anoon after,” the narrator confesses, “That of Dowel ne Dobet no deyntee me ne þouȝte./ I hadde no likyng, leue me, [o]f þe leste of hem ouȝt to knowe” (B.11.46–9). The “likyng” that he observes in Fortune’s mirror, the fleshly comforts of Lust, Greed, and Pride, indeed replaces the narrator’s former “likyng” to attain salvific knowledge. Thus enticed by the seemingly limitless possibilities of experience that his youth promises, the narrator exchanges that which he formerly coveted, “kynde knowynge” of Dowel, for more worldly and immediately gratifying desires, the “myrpes ful manye” of Fortune’s mirror.

Yet, as Elde accurately predicts, at last the narrator’s advancing years demand a reexamination of his life as Fortune and her retinue finally abandon him. Age, like Hunger on the half-acre, acts as a natural remedy for sinfulness, a built-in corrective for human profligacy that sets painful limitations on excess and self-indulgence.⁴⁵ It is only following his sojourn with Fortune that the narrator becomes receptive to Scripture’s lesson. When they meet again, now within the inner dream where the narrator’s emotions are still raw from his sudden fall from Fortune’s favor, Scripture preaches a “teme” on Matthew 22: 14, “For many are called but few are chosen” (B.11.111–14). The narrator is now able to “read” himself in her text, not as one of the chosen, but possibly as one of the “remenaunt” (B.11.114), a realization that sends him reeling: “Al for tene of hir text trembled myn herte,/ And in a weer gan I wexe, and wiþ myself to dispute” (B.11.115–16). He is the picture of a self divided but also on the verge of self-recognition. The onset of old age, an event that

⁴⁵ See Mann, “Eating and Drinking,” p. 29.

anticipates the narrator's more thorough account of his physical abjection in B.20—and another encounter with Kynde, as we saw in Chapter 2—sets a natural limitation on the narrator's detour with Fortune and forces him to reexamine his habits of living since he can no longer live as he had in his youth. But the suffering that accompanies the natural process of aging does not guarantee spiritual amendment. In fact, the figure Lyf's opposite reaction in B.20—faced with sickness and old age and the failure of “phisik,” Lyf scorns repentance and delves more deeply into fleshly comforts (B.20.178–9)—suggests that personal reform is *not* the inevitable outcome of an encounter with Elde. Nevertheless, in the imagined trajectory of the narrator's travels with Fortune in B.11, Langland demonstrates that in rendering human beings spiritually vulnerable, suffering in the world prepares the soul for reform.

Like Scripture, Trajan too warns the narrator to “look within”: “*Melius est scrutari scelera nostra quam naturas rerum*” (B.11.229a).⁴⁶ In his travels with Fortune and later in the shattered Vision of Kynde, Will discovers the hazards of encyclopedic looking, revealing the legitimacy of Trajan's warning, a theme initiated by Holy Church's declaration that truth is a “kynde knowynge þat kenneþ in þyn herte/ For to louen þi Lord leuere þan þiselue” and “[n]o dedly synne to do” (B.1.142–4). However, these passūs also acknowledge that Trajan's imperative presents a false choice: scrutinizing *naturas rerum* is finally for Langland coterminous with the project of scrutinizing the self. It is not only that natural experience leads to self-awareness, including awareness of sin, a process we witness in the Vision of Fortune and throughout these inner passūs. And it is not only that in these passūs as throughout the poem Langland notoriously tangles inner and outer landscapes, the physical with the spiritual, and the natural with the textual. Trajan's injunction to gaze inward presents a false choice because in *Piers Plowman*, as in the Chartrian allegories, human self-knowledge takes shape through integrated study of the natural world.

In the first half of B.11, Fortune's mirror symbolizes and facilitates this reflexive quality of encyclopedic study, which looks outside the self only to return to self-scrutiny. In adapting the medieval trope of the *speculum* as a paragon or guide to virtuous behavior Langland draws on a long and

⁴⁶ In the B-text, these Latin lines fall within the speech usually attributed to Trajan. Their subordination of natural philosophy supports Trajan's celebration of “bileue” and “the lawe of loue” as practices superior to “logyk or lawe” (B.11.227, 218). Trajan attributes the lines to his spiritual patron Gregory, but their precise source remains untraced. Peter Lombard attributes an analogue to Augustine in his *Collectanea*. See Alford, *Guide to the Quotations*, p. 74. Although their authority rests on quite different grounds, compare Trajan's exhortation to Scripture's inauguration of the “inward turn” in B.11: “*Multa sciunt et seipsos nesciunt*” (B.11.3).

varied literary tradition based on the scriptural texts Corinthians 13: 12 and James 1: 23–4.⁴⁷ Langland, for example, cites the Pauline source in Will's exasperated search for charity: "Clerkes kenne me þat Crist is in alle places;/ Ac I seiz hym neuere soþly but as myself in a mirour:/ *Hic in enigmatē, tunc facie ad faciem*" (B.15.161–2a). The trope of the mirror became widespread following Augustine's various elaborations of it, most vividly in his commentary on Psalm 103, in which he compares scripture to a mirror wherein human beings may see themselves both as they are and as they ought to be, a prerequisite for personal reform.⁴⁸ Gregory the Great cites Augustine's formulation and similarly describes scripture as a mirror for self-appraisal: "Scriptura sacra mentis oculis quasi quoddam speculum opponitur, ut interna nostra facies in ipsa uideatur. Ibi etenim foeda ibi pulchra nostra cognoscimus. Ibi sentimus quantum proficimus, ibi a prouectu quam longe distamus" [Sacred scripture is offered like a kind of mirror to the eyes of our mind, that we may see our interior face in it. For there we recognize our ugliness and our beauty. There we measure our progress; there we see how far we are from our goal].⁴⁹ Fortune's mirror does not initially appear to be a source of edification for the narrator or for any human being; but, like Augustine's and Gregory's notion that the mirror of scripture is a gauge for one's spiritual status, the "Mirour þat hizte middelerþe" ultimately reflects back to the narrator, and to his audience, an image of a man abandoned and left destitute by the whims of Fortune and her retinue.⁵⁰ The narrator's vision of himself in the mirror is at once a revelation, a confession, and a cautionary tale. As such, Langland's use of the trope of the mirror corresponds to another Augustinian motif—which develops from a Platonic source—the notion of the mirror of the mind or soul.⁵¹ Depending on the moral clarity of the one in whom it resides, this mirror may reflect either things eternal, the divine ideas and truths that lead to wisdom, or things ephemeral, that is,

⁴⁷ See Bradley, "Backgrounds of the Title *Speculum*."

⁴⁸ Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*.

⁴⁹ *Moralia in Iob*, ed. Marcus Adriaen, CCSL 143 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979), 2.1: 1–4. Translation from *Gregory the Great: Moral Reflections on the Book of Job, Vol. 1, Preface and Books 1–5*, trans. Brian Kerns, Cistercian Studies Series 249 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), p. 117.

⁵⁰ Zeeman similarly describes the "negatively revelatory" function of the "regio dissimilitudinis" and connects the narrator's uncanny sense of alienation from self and from God to the experience of looking into Fortune's mirror (*Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, p. 211). Middleton suggestively posits the mirror as a "moment of long perspective" in which Will, precisely at the juncture of the B-text continuation, looks "before and behind," seeing his unreformed self in the rear view even as he looks forward to "a project of social reclamation and cultivation in the first person" (Middleton, "William Langland's 'Kynde Name,'" pp. 42–51).

⁵¹ See Bradley, "Backgrounds of the Title *Speculum*," especially pp. 105–8.

images of the sensory world and its correspondingly false pleasures. When the narrator complains to Anima that he cannot see evidence of Christ but only sees him “as myself in a mirour,” he reveals a certain moral dullness, a failure that impairs his spiritual sight. The mirror of his soul is still angled toward the shadow world of Fortune and Middelærpe. But the narrator’s complaint is also poignantly universal, as all human souls are cloudy with respect to divine truth. Finally, in a more fundamental misapprehension, the narrator fails to recognize the value of the limited vision he does possess: to see Christ even darkly united with his own visage is truly the beginnings of charity on earth.

The trope of the worldly mirror develops in two distinct medieval genres. The term *speculum* introduces a number of encyclopedic works, most famously Vincent of Beauvais’s threefold *Speculum maius*. In this sense, the mirror of human cognition seeks to encompass knowledge of the created world, a project that I discuss in detail below. The notion of the mirror as a representation of the world also appears in the *De contemptu mundi* genre and, later, in the secular “mirrors for princes,” in both cases texts that seek to teach their readers about the unstable and transient nature of the world. Langland’s allegory of the narrator’s encounter with Fortune’s mirror in B.11 draws on both expressions of this tradition in presenting simultaneously an image of the desire for experience of and in the world as well as a warning about the worthlessness of worldly desires and the dangers of natural experience. It is significant that the narrator looks into Fortune’s false mirror immediately after scorning Scripture and Clergy, both of which are elsewhere figured as *true* mirrors.⁵² Following the twofold experience of Fortune’s mirror—wherein the narrator beholds the things of the world and becomes sinful and also beholds himself as he is there in his deformity (Gregory’s “foeda”)—the narrator then becomes receptive to what Scripture, a “proper” mirror, has to say to him. The knowledge that Fortune offers is thus finally spiritually useful in that it

⁵² Langland himself does not compare Holy Scripture to a mirror directly, though the conceit remains near the surface of his treatment of the Bible. For example, Imaginatif describes the Bible as a reflection of “Seint Spirit þe samplarie,” and then compares holy texts to vision itself: “For as a man may noȝt see þat mysseþ hise eizen,/ Na moore kan no clerk but if he cauȝte it first þoruȝ bokes” (B.12.102, 99–100). See also Book’s “two brode eizen” at B.18.229, which traditionally symbolize the two testaments, but also present an image of unobstructed and amply perceptive vision, a mirror-like luminance that might serve to guide the spiritually blind. Imaginatif employs the trope of the mirror directly when he tells the narrator that Clergy and Kynde Wit “boþe [as mirours ben] to amenden oure defautes” (B.12.95), a passage that I discuss below. Anima similarly refers to Thomas Becket, a saint and a clergyman, as a “forbisene to alle bisshopes and a bryȝt myrour” (B.15.526). See Lawrence Warner, “Becket and the Hopping Bishops,” *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 17 (2003): pp. 107–34. On the poem’s “other mirrors” and their affinity with mirrors in the commentary tradition, see Wittig, “Inward Journey,” pp. 236–41.

generates for the narrator a picture of himself as a sinner;⁵³ or, to put it a different way, while Fortune does not actually answer to his quest for a definition of Dowel, she does provide a means “to knowe þe false,” a desire that the narrator expresses to Holy Church in B.2 just prior to the vision of Lady Meed (B.2.4). As Mary Carruthers explains, Fortune’s mirror offers a “visionary parable . . . of ‘do-evil.’”⁵⁴ And yet, although the episode has a happy ending—the narrator emerges aged but ready for reform—the Vision of Fortune also evokes the hazards of natural experience and the tenuousness of salvation in a treacherous world. This passage reminds its audience that a recklessly passive openness to natural experience in a world capriciously governed by Fortune is a gamble best avoided, for the outcome of Will’s wandering might easily have been one less favorably fortuitous.

Fortune’s mirror of “Middelærþe” captures life at the level of the “fair feeld ful of folk,” the experience of fallen human existence. By contrast, in the paired Vision of Kynde, which follows an interlude with Scripture, Lewte, and Trajan, the narrator beholds the world again, this time from a lofty vantage point, as he had done previously with Holy Church by his side in the prologue. The turn inward signaled by the dream-within-a-dream now appears to give way to another turn outward in his meditation on the created world. Yet as in the Vision of Fortune, in which the narrator first subjectively experiences the world and all it has to offer (as well as to retract) so also in the Vision of Kynde Langland destabilizes the distinctions between inner and outer perspectives, between knowledge of oneself and knowledge of the greater creation. The narrator looks into the *speculum* of the world not to see the world, but to see himself as he is within that world.

EXEMPLARISM AND ITS LIMITS

When the Vision of Kynde commences, the narrator has the opportunity to survey all of creation from his lofty perspective upon Middelærþe. As in the Vision of Fortune, the narrator is again “fet forþ” and made to look upon a vast spectacle (B.11.324). In contrast to his participation in the scene he beholds within Fortune’s mirror—in a sense, the narrator views his own life there—the Vision of Kynde initially presents the narrator as a

⁵³ Wittig and Zeeman reach similar conclusions. Fortune’s mirror “enables true seeing, showing the sinful soul to itself” (Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, p. 211) and the paired visions of Fortune and Kynde together elicit a “personal, affective response” for, in each, “the dreamer has been made to look at himself as a sinner who must reform” (Wittig, “Inward Journey,” p. 243).

⁵⁴ Carruthers, *The Search for St. Truth*, p. 96.

detached observer. He becomes emotionally involved in the spectacle of creation, and later understands himself to be morally and metaphysically implicated as well, as the behavior of its inhabitants inspires first awe and then ire.

At the outset, the Vision of Kynde is encyclopedic in its scope. The narrator observes the diversity before him with admiration and wonder:

I seiȝ þe sonne and þe see and þe sond after,
 And where þat briddes and beestes by hir make þei yeden,
 Wilde wormes in wodes, and wonderful foweles
 Wiȝ fleckede feperes and of fele colours . . .
 And siȝen I loked vpon þe see and so forþ vpon þe sterres;
 Manye selkoupes I seiȝ, ben noȝt to seye nouȝe.
 I seiȝ floures in þe fryth and hir faire colours,
 And how among þe grene gras grewe so manye hewes,
 And some soure and some swete—selkoup me þouȝte;
 Of hir kynde and of hir colour to carpe it were to longe.
 (B.11.326–9, 362–7)

Sketching out the various physical realms of nature—"þe sonne and þe see and þe sond," the "wodes," the "sterres," and the "fryth"—as well as the creatures appropriate to each elemental sphere, the narrator's observations convey a sense of the spaciousness and organization of the natural world. Though it does not reproduce their specificity, this passage allusively gestures toward other catalogues of nature in literary and encyclopedic texts, and even the conventionality of the narrator's descriptions further suggests his awe before the natural world. He protests that language is insufficient to convey the truth of what he sees: "Manye selkoupes I seiȝ, ben noȝt to seye nouȝe" and "Of hir kynde and of hir colour to carpe it were to longe" (B.11.363, 367). The choice of the term "selkoup," meaning "a wonder," or even "a miracle," indicates that the narrator's initial reaction to the natural world remains at the level of awestruck, reverential praise, a posture required by the exemplarist method, which presupposes God's own presence in creation and sets limitations on what human knowledge might discover about nature's workings.⁵⁵

Hugh of St. Victor's exemplarist meditations on the natural world offer a useful comparison with the narrator's initially reverential orientation toward nature. In his twelfth-century Latin treatise *De tribus diebus*, Hugh glosses Romans 1: 20, as Augustine had, to show that the wondrous, observable qualities of creation proclaim the greatness of their creator. The immensity ("inmensitas") of created things makes manifest God's

⁵⁵ MED s.v. "selcouth(e)," n. (b).

power ("potentia"); their beauty ("decor") reveals his wisdom ("sapientia"); and their benefit to humankind ("utilitas") signifies his goodness ("benignitas").⁵⁶ By observing these wonderful characteristics, Hugh writes, one may not only conclude that God created the world, but also discover certain of God's own characteristics as they are "written" into the things of creation.

In a moment of reverie, Hugh professes his amazement at the unbounded quantity of created things ("Quam multa!" he exclaims), reciting element by element a catalogue of "innumerabilia":

Quam multa! Quot sunt! Numera stellas caeli, arenam maris, puluerem terrae, guttas pluuiæ, pennas uolucrum, squamas piscium, pilos animalium, gramina camporum, folia uel fructus arborum, et caeterorum innumerabilium innumerabilia numera.⁵⁷

[How numerous! How many they are! Count the stars in the sky, grains of sand in the sea, specks of dust upon the earth, raindrops in the clouds, feathers on birds, scales on fish, hairs upon beasts, grasses in the fields, leaves and fruits upon the trees, and the innumerable number of innumerable other things.]

Even as he anatomizes creation, Hugh remains alert to his human ignorance before God's mystery, for in naming these things "innumerabilia," he signals his awareness of the boundaries of human knowledge. Sometimes Hugh's perception of these limitations is poignantly described, as when, in a passage that resonates with the narrator's desire for "kynde knowynge," Hugh wishes that his ability to perceive the meaning of created things and to describe them to others might match his passion to appreciate them: "Et hæc utinam ego tam possem subtiliter perspicere, tam competenter enarrare, quam possum ardentè diligere" [If only I were able to discern these things as accurately, to recount them as adequately, as I am able ardently to love them!].⁵⁸ Nevertheless, despite the limitations of his understanding, he is inspired by the delightfulness of creation to sing out its praise and, citing Psalm 91, invites others to join him:

[C]um psalmista stupentes et admirentes clamemus: "Quam magnificata sunt opera tua, Domine! omnia in sapientia fecisti; delectasti me, Domine, in factura tua, et in operibus manuum tuarum exultabo. Quam magnificata sunt opera tua, Domine!"⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Hugh of St. Victor, *De tribus diebus* 1.14–15: "Potentiam manifestat creaturarum immensitas, sapientiam decor, benignitatem utilitas." Hugh cites Romans 1.20 in *De tribus diebus* 1.5–6, p. 3: "Inuisibilia enim ipsius a creatura mundi per ea quæ facta sunt intellecta conspiciuntur." The three "inuisibilia," according to Hugh's interpretation, toward which nature points us, are God's "potentia," "sapientia," and "benignitas."

⁵⁷ Hugh of St. Victor, *De tribus diebus* 2.44–51.

⁵⁸ Hugh of St. Victor, *De tribus diebus*, 4.83–4.

⁵⁹ Hugh of St. Victor, *De tribus diebus*, 4.87–91.

[With the psalmist let us exclaim in astonishment and wonder: "O Lord, how great are thy works! You have made all things in your wisdom; you have brought me delight, Lord, in your creation, and I shall rejoice in the work of your hands. O Lord, how great are thy works!"]

Hugh's meditation on nature thus demonstrates how poetic praise might legitimately issue from one's contemplation of created things when they are understood as the works ("opera") of their divine maker. But Psalm 91 also cautions that not all observers will be able to understand what they behold in nature, for the "[v]ir insipiens" [foolish man] either does not perceive nature's splendor or cannot fathom its proper source and significance.⁶⁰ Later, in declaring that nature is a kind of book written by God himself ("quasi quidam liber est scriptus digito Dei"), Hugh compares those who are "illiterate" before the book of nature with the "illiteratus" who gazes at an open book ("liber apertus") and can see but not comprehend the meaning of the characters etched upon its pages.⁶¹ Even the book of nature preserves the secrets of God from the "stultus et animalis homo" [foolish and beastlike man], for though such a man may observe the figures and letters of created things, he cannot finally comprehend their true meaning. The illiterate observer of nature can only see the "species," or outward forms, of created things, while the wise and spiritual observer not only delights in the outward beauty of God's works, but simultaneously perceives their inner significance as symbols of the creator's power, wisdom, and goodness.

Hugh's treatise on the rewards of viewing creation illustrates the exemplarist mindset at work and thus provides a useful context for Langland's Vision of Kynde. Both speakers observe nature from a similar vantage point and express an "encyclopedic" wish to collect and analyze their observations; but Hugh's contemplation directs him to sing out the creator's praise, which issues as the *De tribus diebus* itself, while Langland's narrator appears to be the "vir insipiens," the foolish and carnal man who is unable to "read" nature correctly. As Imaginatif will later explain to the narrator, "pow wiþ rude speche/ Lakkedest and losedest þyng þat longed noȝt þe to doone./ Tho [no liking hadde he] for to lere þe moore" (B.11.418–20). The narrator's "rude speche," it would seem, reveals his spiritual illiteracy before the book of nature, and so the vision ends,

⁶⁰ Hugh of St. Victor, *De tribus diebus*, 4.92–3: "Vir insipiens non cognoscet, et stultus non intelliget haec."

⁶¹ Hugh of St. Victor, *De tribus diebus*, 4.94–102: "Quemadmodum autem si illiteratus quis apertum librum uideat, figuras aspicit, literas non cognoscit, ita stultus et animalis homo qui non percipit ea quae Dei sunt, in uisibilibus istis creaturis foris uidet speciem, sed non intelligit rationem." Rudd, "Thinking through Earth," argues that Hugh's reference to nature as a book "scriptus digito Dei" restricts access to "trained readers only," an exclusivity at odds with the metaphor's usual implication of open access (p. 140).

signaling the limits of what “kynde” can teach him or, from another angle, the limits of what he is prepared to learn from “kynde.” Before we reach this point, however, Langland challenges the authority of the discourse he had initially evoked. Although the Vision of Kynde begins as an exemplarist venture, the narrator’s observations soon lead him to fixate on an apparent flaw in the natural order—human sin—that presents a pessimistic challenge to the inherently optimistic rationale of exemplarism.

LANGLAND’S BEASTS AND THE HUMAN ANOMALY

The narrator’s description of the natural scene before him, general at first, becomes more exact and more critical as he moves from an awestruck appreciation of the beauty and variety of nature to observe specific details of animal behavior.⁶² He focuses on the creatures’ “reasonable” consumption of food, reproductive habits, and domestic arrangements: “Reson I seiȝ sooply sewen alle beestes/ In etynge, in drynkyng and in engendrynge of kynde” (B.11.334–5).⁶³ In making a closer examination of animal behavior, the narrator begins to home in on the specifics of the scene before him, departing from the broadly wondrous account of his initial, generalized observations. In the manner of a medieval encyclopedist, the narrator describes the details of animal behavior, including their sexual practices. He is astounded by the beasts’ restraint in regard to their reproductive task:

And after cours of concepcion noon took kepe of ooper
As whan þei hadde ryde in rotey tyme; anoonriȝt þerafter
Males drowen hem to males amorwenynges by hemselue,
And in euenynges also zede males fro femelles.
Ther ne was cow ne cowkynde þat conceyued hadde
That wolde belwe after boles, ne boor after sowe.
Bope hors and houndes and alle opere beestes
Medled noȝt wiþ hir makes þat [mid] fole were. (B.11.336–43)

In the C-text, Will’s observation of non-human animals concludes with a critique of human behavior, which anticipates the more disruptive outburst ahead:

⁶² On wonder and marvel as proper responses to God’s creation, see Rudd, “Thinking through Earth,” especially pp. 140–4.

⁶³ Alford traces the association of reason and moderation (or “mesure”), with particular attention to the Vision of Kynde, in “The Idea of Reason,” pp. 210–15.

Ther ne was no kyne kynde that conseyued hadde
 That ne lees the lykyng of lost of flesch, as hit were,
 Saue man and his make—and þerof me wondrede;
 For out of resoun they ryde and rechelesliche token on,
 And in derne dedes, bothe drynkyng and elles. (C.13.151–5)

As this passage reveals, the sticking point for the narrator is the paradox that human beings (“man and his make”), uniquely endowed with reason, are the only creatures that do not behave “reasonably” in sexual matters.⁶⁴ As he studies a tableau of wondrous animal behavior, it is the particularity of human *misbehavior* that most impresses the narrator. It appears, moreover, that Langland takes pains to arrange this scene to emphasize the isolation of human beings within creation.

A brief comparison of Bartholomaeus’s description of the mating practices of beasts establishes how greatly Langland diverges from typical encyclopedic depictions of animal behavior in order to highlight the disjunction presented by humankind. In describing the lustiness of bovine mating practices, Bartholomaeus invests their behavior with rather human qualities:

[B]oles fighten for here wyfes and he þat haþ the maystrey lepeþ on þe female; and whanne he is yfebled by moche work of lecchery þanne he þat was ouercome comeþ and fighteþ wiþ him; and he þat haþ þe maistrie lepeþ on þe female, as it were, makyng ioye of þe maistrie.⁶⁵

Bartholomaeus anthropomorphizes the beasts in the manner typical of encyclopedic and bestiary accounts, translating their instinctual behavior into human terms and imagining humans and animals on a single continuum. In contrast, Langland’s account isolates human beings, separating humans from animals and presenting humankind as an aberration, an anomaly within the larger order of nature. Unlike the encyclopedists and the bestiaries, the narrator does not perceive animals as reflections of human behavior that offer positive and negative moral examples; instead, he envisions them as part of a natural order from which human beings are divided. Humanity is an island in nature, standing out like a sore thumb, a

⁶⁴ Davis, “*Piers Plowman* and the *Querelle*,” reads Langland’s emphasis on the “measured mating” of animals as a response to Jean de Meun’s and Alan of Lille’s concerns with “queer coupling” and identifies Augustine’s *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* as Langland’s source for the animals’ moderation (p. 62). On the Augustinian connection, see also Davis, “On the Sadness of Not Being a Bird: Late-Medieval Marriage Ideologies and the Figure of Abraham in William Langland’s *Piers Plowman*,” in *Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing and Household in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. P.J.P. Goldberg and Maryanne Kowaleski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 209–30.

⁶⁵ Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things* 18.100, pp. 1251–2.

defect, a worm in God's bliss. For amid the harmony of nature that he initially beholds with admiration, the narrator perceives that human beings alone refuse to abide by Reason's dictates:

Man and his make I myzte se boþe;
 Pouerte and plentee, boþe pees and werre,
 Blisse and bale—boþe I seiz at ones,
 And how men token Mede and Mercy refused. (B.11.330–3)

The narrator here observes a set of contraries held in balance—the good with the bad—but the final statement jars the balance of the first three lines with a revelation of human corruption: “man and his make” do wrong *and* refuse forgiveness. The exceptionality of human misbehavior overwhelms the narrator and he can no longer marvel at the “[m]any selkouþes” of creation before him (B.11.363). As we have seen, the order, intelligence, and beauty that the narrator initially perceives in this vision almost succeed in leading him toward a discovery of God, who, disguised as Kynde, has authorized the vision for this very purpose; however, it is ultimately the narrator's inability to reconcile the human place in nature—the painful awareness of the human incongruity within an otherwise perfect scene—that brings his vision to a premature close. The narrator blames Reason, and by extension, the natural order itself, for failing to keep human beings out of trouble:

Ac þat moost meued me and my mood chaunged—
 That Reson rewarded and ruled alle beestes
 Saue man and his make: many tymes and ofte
 No Reson hem folwede, [neiper riche ne pouere].
 And þanne I rebukede Reson. (B.11.368–72)

In these lines Langland again draws attention to the divide between human and animal creation, depicting “man and his make” as outcasts of an otherwise unified world composed of “alle beestes” (B.11.369–70).

The notion that human beings sit apart and at a disadvantage, both physically and morally speaking, in relation to non-human animals is a conceit we have seen before. In Alan's *De planctu*, the narrator marvels at Natura's garments, which depict an encyclopedic panorama of creation, including catalogues of birds, fish, and beasts of the earth (2.138–292). In the portion of her tunic reserved for human beings, however, Alan's narrator notices an unsightly gash in the fabric: “In qua parte tunica, suarum partium passa dissidium, suarum iniuriarum contumelias demonstrabat. In reliquis tamen locis partes, eleganti continuatione concordēs, nullam diuisionis in se sustinebant discordiam” [In this section, the tunic had suffered a rending of its parts and showed the effects of injuries and insults.

In the other sections, however, the parts had sustained no injury from division or discord in the beautiful harmony of their unbroken surface] (2.234–7). Like Langland's description of how human greed upsets the harmonious balance of opposites in B.11.330–3, Alan also uses terms of continuity and disruption to emphasize the human exception. Later, Natura reveals that the tear in her robe is caused by human disregard for her laws; "solus homo" [man alone] disobeys her and produces a dislocation that mars the perfection of the created world (8.12–13). As in the Vision of Kynde, in Alan's allegory of nature, human beings are represented as an exception to the natural order and this exceptionality, at least initially, seems to pose a significant threat to human spiritual progress.

In a recent study of animals in Shakespeare, Laurie Shannon traces this same problem of human deficiency in early modern literature, usefully describing it as a rhetorical concept she calls "negative human exceptionalism."⁶⁶ We might place King Lear's tirade on the heath alongside Alan's and Langland's visions of human insufficiency, for in describing man as "unaccommodated . . . a poor, bare, forked animal," Lear similarly points to the exceptional status of human beings in nature. He laments the apparent injustice within creation whereby, as Shannon puts it, "only the appropriated coats and borrowed practical knowledge of other creatures equip humankind for the world, while all other creatures are understood to arrive prepared."⁶⁷ While Lear's concerns seem to be largely practical ones, other writers in the period expressed the human disadvantage in theological terms quite similar to those in B.11, where Langland had formulated the problem. In the Holy Sonnets, for instance, John Donne poses the injustice this way:

If poisonous minerals, and if that tree,
Whose fruit threw death on else immortal us,
If lecherous goats, if serpents envious
Cannot be damned; alas, why should I be?
Why should intent or reason, born in me,
Make sins, else equal, in me more heinous?⁶⁸

For Donne the uniquely human capacity for free will ("intent or reason, born in me") and, implicitly, the uniquely human potential for reward or

⁶⁶ Shannon, "The Eight Animals in Shakespeare, or, Before the Human," *PMLA* 124, no. 2 (2009): p. 477.

⁶⁷ Shannon, "The Eight Animals in Shakespeare," p. 477.

⁶⁸ Donne, "Holy Sonnet 9," in *Complete English Poems*, ed. A.J. Smith (London: Penguin, 1996), lines 1–8. Shannon discusses Donne's poem in "Poor, Bare, Forked: Animal Sovereignty, Human Negative Exceptionalism, and the Natural History of *King Lear*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (2009): pp. 168–96.

punishment in the afterlife, become also a uniquely human burden. As Shannon argues, "Man stands categorically above the beasts for Donne, to be sure; but his distinction is the ambivalent one of possessing a unique capacity to swerve, or fall, from type. A rational soul is 'proper' to man, but it follows inevitably that the capacity for improper choice is thus his too."⁶⁹

These explorations of the human place in the greater scheme of creation invert typical expectations of human supremacy. Along with Alan's *De planctu*, they offer a sustained tradition of inquiry in which Langland's Vision of Kynde plays an important part. Moreover, each of these examples further highlights the way in which human encounters with the animal world provoke the shock of negative human exceptionalism. In *Piers Plowman*, Will's awe before nature turns to agitation upon closer inspection of animal behavior but, specifically, when he compares the animals' apparently reasonable activity to the immoderation that characterizes human life.

While Donne evokes "lecherous goats" and "serpents envious" to underscore the injustice of the human condition, basing his complaint on a notion that humans and animals are "sinners" alike though not judged on equal terms, the animals that the narrator observes from Middelærpe are all virtuous creatures. Langland presents a sanitized and orderly vision of reproduction to establish more definitively that all animal creation, "saue man and his make," operates in accord with reason and moderation. In doing so, he diverges from the encyclopedic tradition and its representation of animal sexuality. For example, in describing the diversity of behavior found in nature, Bartholomaeus anthropomorphizes animal mating practices in a way that is reminiscent of the *Parliament of Fowls*:

And some bestes bep fulle cruel and redy to rees and to fight and
 nameliche in tyme of loue and of alle seruice of Venus. In alle bestes
 is appetit of loue lykyng and þanne þe males woweþ and plesip þe
 females and ghyteþ for hem.⁷⁰

As we have noted above, Bartholomaeus describes how bulls copulate with pleasure and abandon, fighting with other males for the chance to "leap" upon a female until they are "yfebled by moche work of lechery" and then

⁶⁹ Shannon, "Poor, Bare, Forked," p. 176. For another medieval example, see also Palamon's Boethian lament for suffering innocence in *KtT* 1303–27. Palamon complains that human beings are exposed to the hazards of corporeal life like any other animal ("slayn is man right as another beest," line 1309) and yet, unlike non-human animals, humans are obliged to be moral in attending their bodily needs ("man is bounden to his observaunce,/ For Goddes sake, to letten of his wille,/ Ther as a beest may al his lust fulfille," lines 1316–18).

⁷⁰ Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things* 18.1, p. 1094.

“mak[e] ioye” of their physical and sexual triumph.⁷¹ Langland’s disinterested animals would thus seem to be at odds with those found in this influential encyclopedia, which holds that “alle bestes” possess “appetit of loue lykyng.” Moreover, the bestiary tradition provides further evidence that medieval impressions of animal sexuality differed greatly from the picture of moderation found in *Piers Plowman*.⁷² For example, in the bestiaries, the male partridge is an “unclean bird, for male mounts male, and lust rashly forgets gender”;⁷³ the stag “rages with lustful frenzy” though only at the “appointed time of breeding”;⁷⁴ the male goat is a “wanton animal given to butting, and always burning for coitus, and, on account of lust, his eyes are always casting about”;⁷⁵ the female viper, “frenzied by lust, bites off the head of the male” and, “whenever he feels a desire for coitus,” the male viper is also said to lure eels to unnatural copulation.⁷⁶

Although bestiaries do not shy away from graphic depictions of animal “lust,” their representation of sexuality is nevertheless quite varied, for while the animals found in these texts are not the rational and restrained creatures of Langland’s vision, neither are they uniformly controlled by physical passions. Debra Hassig has shown that this variation in descriptions of sexual practices serves a useful symbolic function in the bestiaries, for sex is always tied to a moral value and determines whether the creature would serve as a “model or antimodel” for human moral behavior. “What becomes obvious,” Hassig writes, “is that sex and evil go hand in hand: the more sexually involved the creature, the greater its perceived evil. As a corollary to this, freedom from sex is equated with moral virtue.”⁷⁷ To counterbalance Donne’s “lecherous goats,” the bestiaries also offer chaste elephants, steadfast turtle doves, and sexless bees.⁷⁸ While on the whole his encyclopedia highlights the pleasure that animals take in sexual

⁷¹ Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, 18.100, pp. 1251–2.

⁷² Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, 18.1, p. 1094.

⁷³ Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts*, p. 179: “Avis . . . immunda, nam masculus in masculum insurgit, et obliuiscitur sexum libido praecipit.”

⁷⁴ Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts*, p. 135: “Mares generis huius, cum statutum tempus venerem incitat, saeuunt rabie libidinis.”

⁷⁵ Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts*, p. 152: “Hircus lasciuum animal et petulcum, et feruens semper ad coitum, cuius oculi ob libidinem in transversum aspicunt.”

⁷⁶ Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts*, p. 195: “Illa autem ex voluptate in rabiem versa, caput maris ore recepit praecidit . . . Ubi coeundi cupiditatem assumpserit, muraenae maritimae notam sibi requirit copulam.”

⁷⁷ Hassig, “Sex in the Bestiaries,” in *The Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life, and Literature*, ed. Hassig (New York: Garland, 1999), p. 73.

⁷⁸ See the entries for each of these creatures in Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts*, pp. 127–30; 185–6; and 190–3. For discussion of the bestiaries’ examples of chaste animals, including the elephant’s mating habits and the “moderate sex lives” of bestiary fish, see Hassig, “Sex in the Bestiaries,” pp. 75–7.

encounters, even Bartholomaeus describes the behavior of one class of creatures in terms quite similar to the narrator's wholesome description of the cows above:

And briddes and foules gendrynge kepiþ couenable tyme, for in springe
tyme whanne þe generacioun comeþ inne, briddes crien and singen. Males
drawen to companye of females and preyen iche opir of loue and wowiþ by
beckes and voys, and makeþ nestis and leggiþ eyren and bryngiþ forþ
briddes . . . But whanne þe offyce of generacioun is fulendid, þanne þey
sesen of songe and departen atwynne and comeþ nouzt togedres forto
tyme of generacioun come azeine.⁷⁹

Although Bartholomaeus later seems to contradict his own depiction of restrained avian sexuality in his descriptions of "lecherous" colvers, peacocks, and sparrows,⁸⁰ it is possible that Langland had in mind a passage such as the one above and simply extended it to cover the behavior of all animals. In the Vision of Kynde, there is no hint that beasts engage in sexual activity because it is pleasurable; they convene only for procreative purposes, and only during the appropriate season. As in Trevisa's translation above, they "kepiþ couenable tyme." Both extremes of description are anthropomorphic, for one assigns sin and lechery, while the other imputes virtue and reason.

Throughout the Vision of Kynde, the narrator compares the "reasonable" behavior of the animals to that of their human counterparts, with the animals appearing more virtuous and skillful in each case. Moving on from the sexual behavior of beasts, the narrator next observes how birds appear to behave reasonably in building their homes and raising their young. For example, he notes the magpie's ingenuity when he beholds her intricately constructed nest, an avian dwelling place so finely wrought that he doubts any human builder could match it: "Ther is no wrizte, as I wene, sholde werche hir nest to paye;/ If any mason made a molde þerto, muche wonder it were" (B.11.348–9). His considerations of the superior skill demonstrated by the magpie and the other birds' seemingly wise strategies for protecting their eggs lead the narrator to speculate about the source of their knowledge. "I hadde wonder at whom and wher þe pye/ Lerne to legge þe stikkes in which she leyeþ and bredeþ," he says, later adding: "Muche merueilled me what maister þei hadde,/ And who tauzte hem on trees to tymbre so heizē/ Ther neiþer burn ne beest may hir briddes rechen" (B.11.346–7, 359–61). The wonderful proficiency of these creatures finally leads the narrator to the verge of discovering God's role in the

⁷⁹ Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, 12.1, p. 598.

⁸⁰ Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, 12.7, p. 615; 12.32, p. 638; and 12.33, p. 639.

scene before him, just as the exemplarist method predicts; however, caught up in his concern for human waywardness, he does not recognize the implications of his inquiry: God himself is the “maister” who teaches the animals, insofar as he has ordained creation.

The Vision of Kynde stops short of achieving its exemplarist purpose because the narrator is unable to assimilate the exceptionality of human “kynde” and his own complicity in the sinfulness that is a natural consequence of the exclusively human capacity for free will. Reconciliation of this paradox can only follow patient acceptance of Kynde’s provision for creation, even the possibility that suffering and sin are facts of human experience. As Wit had first explained, Kynde is lord “of lisse and of peyne” (B.9.29), and as Reason asks the narrator in the conclusion of the Vision of Kynde, “Who suffreþ moore þan God? . . . He myzte amende in a minute while al þat mysstandeþ,/ Ac he suffreþ for som mannes goode, and so is oure better” (B.11.379–81). The verb “suffer” here primarily means “to allow,” as well as “to endure” and “to experience pain.”⁸¹ While God might “amende” what the narrator perceives as a flaw in creation, Reason attests that God suffers, or *allows*, disorder for humankind’s own good. The proper response to recognizing an apparent injustice in nature, Reason tells the narrator, is not criticism, but “suffraunce,” or patience, which he defines as “a swift vengeance” (B.11.378). Yet while Reason promotes patience, he does not prohibit the study of nature, denounce its value, or forbid taking interpretive or ethical action to fulfill its perceived deficiencies. Instead, by emphasizing God’s supremacy as nature’s creator, he instructs the narrator to approach the order of nature—which Reason himself represents—with deference, turning inside out the language of “lakke,” which is both a verb meaning “to criticize” and a noun indicating “deficiency”: “For be a man fair or foul, it falleth nouȝt for to lakke/ The shap ne þe shaft þat God shoop hymselfe” (B.11.394–5). Recalling Wit’s introduction of Kynde, Reason reminds Will that God is the world’s creator, the “maister” whose identity he pondered in vain. Looking at nature must, therefore, begin and end with reverence, an assumption that all is right. “For al þat he wrouȝte was wel ydo,” Reason avows (B.11.396). This conclusion does not invalidate Will’s encyclopedic desire to “lyve and loke” (B.8.58), but rather gives form to its determinations. Reason’s speech teaches Will to put his trust in the “shap” that God “shoop” (B.11.395). The following interlocutor, Imaginatif, will demonstrate through specific examples drawn from nature how to coax spiritual meaning from that

⁸¹ *MED* s.v. “sufferen,” v., 8b. See my discussion of God’s involvement in suffering in Chapter 2.

“shap,” that is, how human creativity can licitly proceed from God’s creativity.

THE LESSONS OF THE PEACOCK

Waking from his encounter with Kynde and Reason, the narrator meets Imaginatif, a figure who is especially well suited to address the narrator’s explorations of the natural world. Encyclopedias are important repositories for medieval theories of the imagination, a faculty whose intermediary position between the outer senses and the inner wits, of which it is a part, establishes its crucial role in exemplarist thinking. According to Bartholomaeus, for example, the imagination receives data from the “vttir witte” and then processes this information by forming images and similitudes, abstract concepts by which the mind categorizes and stores impressions of the external world; furthermore, the imagination enables human beings to apprehend the “liknes and schappis of þingis” even when they are not present, recombining collected sensory observations in order to speculate about things that have never been experienced.⁸² As Michelle Karnes explains, Imaginatif enables Will “to make the transition from natural knowledge, the knowledge that the individual obtains through the natural faculties of sense and reason, to what we might call spiritual understanding, that is, understanding created things as they pertain to God.”⁸³ This capacity for abstraction makes imagination a vital component of exemplarist projects, for the imagination is the means by which the human mind first begins to move from *sensibilia*, the sensible things perceived by the “vttir witte,” to higher truths that remain unknown, but which might be imagined based on sensory observations.

⁸² Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, 3.10, p. 98. On Imaginatif’s role in the context of medieval psychological theory see A.J. Minnis, “Langland’s Ymaginatif and Late-Medieval Theories of Imagination,” *Comparative Criticism* 3 (1981): pp. 71–103, and, recently, Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition*, who argues that Imaginatif plays a decisive role in turning natural knowledge to spiritual knowledge in *Piers Plowman*’s central passūs (see pp. 179–206). Other recent studies by Mary Carruthers and Ralph Hanna have emphasized the figure’s associations with elementary education and pedagogical practices. See Carruthers, “Imaginatif, Memoria, and ‘The Need for Critical Theory’ in *Piers Plowman* Studies,” *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 9 (1995): pp. 103–14, and Hanna, “Langland’s Ymaginatif: Images and the Limits of Poetry,” in *Images, Idolatry, and Iconoclasm in Late Medieval England*, ed. Jeremy Dimmick, James Simpson, and Nicolette Zeeman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 81–94.

⁸³ Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition*, p. 180. My reading of Imaginatif’s role shares Karnes’s view that the figure “schools Will in the rudiments of natural theology” (p. 198), and we come to similar conclusions about the episode’s integrative purpose.

In furthering Will's education on the relative value of natural knowledge, Imaginatif broaches a central question in the poem's ongoing "learning debate": whether Clergy or Kynde Wit—terms roughly equivalent to book learning and natural capacities, respectively—better equips human beings to attain the knowledge necessary to salvation.⁸⁴ In so doing, Imaginatif aligns the narrator's encyclopedic observations with pagan learning and casts doubt on natural knowledge as a means to Christian truth. The concept of Clergy implies Christian learning, revelation mediated not only through the technologies of literacy, but also through sacramental, pastoral, and other proper institutional channels. Kynde Wit, by contrast, is associated with the natural man who seeks truth by "living and looking," as the narrator sets out to do at the beginning of the "inner dream" (B.8.58), relying on sensory observations and the power of reason, but without the revelation of Christian truth to guide him. While Clergy is "kepere vnder Crist of heuene" (B.12.126) and mediates authoritative spiritual truths to the rest of humanity, Kynde Wit merely takes its best stab at truth based on the isolated observations it scrapes together, an approach to knowledge that is described in terms strikingly similar to the narrator's activity in B.11: "Ac kynde wit comeþ of alle kynnes siztes—/ Of briddes and of beestes, of blisse and of sorwe/ Of tastes of trupe and of deceites" (B.12.128–30). Imaginatif concedes that Clergy and Kynde Wit each have value in leading human beings toward an understanding of truth, affirming that both approaches may serve as mirrors for self-improvement and ladders leading to Christ, once again invoking the metaphors of exemplarist discourse (B.12.95–6). Nevertheless, the hierarchy remains in place, for Clergy is charged with the duty of educating those who live by Kynde Wit alone. According to Imaginatif, the search for wisdom without the guiding truths of Christianity relies on "selkouþes" and "diuerse siztes," observations of the natural world and sensory experience (B.12.132, 136). Yet while the ancients considered their arts "an heiz science," Imaginatif contends that the knowledge they labored to obtain never saved any souls (B.12.133–4). Compared with Clergy—of which "Cristes loue...is roote"—the Kynde Wit of the pagans is but a "truffe," merely worldly wisdom (B.12.71, 138).

Imaginatif's definition of the pagan philosophers' knowledge is thus aligned with the worldly, experiential knowledge the narrator seeks when earlier in the poem he announces his intention to "lyue and loke" and "go

⁸⁴ On the relationship of *clergie*, *kynde knowynge*, and *kynde wit*, see Middleton, "Narration and the Invention of Experience," pp. 99–121; White, *Nature and Salvation*, pp. 3–40; Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, pp. 201–44; and Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition*, pp. 188–206.

lerne better" (B.8.58). In fact, each time the narrator proclaims his desire for "kynde knowyng," he associates that sort of knowledge with visual observation and personal experience akin to the "diuerse siztes" and "tastes of truþe" that define Kynde Wit (B.12.136, 130). Although the Vision of Kynde is apparently sanctioned by God himself, Imaginatif's arguments in B.12 now appear to devalue the activity that Kynde offers Will when he places him upon Middelerþe for the purpose of observing nature. It is important to recognize, however, that Imaginatif's critique specifically targets what Ralph Hanna calls the narrator's "random, recursive, and possibly unpointed passive openness to experience."⁸⁵ Observations of the natural world must have a guiding purpose in order to be spiritually useful.

The conclusion of Imaginatif's dialogue with the narrator offers an answer to the problem of knowledge posed at a moment of crisis in B.11. If Imaginatif explicitly condemns "passive" observation and compilation as a method of cognition—as Karnes notes, he charges Will with "cognitive excess"⁸⁶—he also shows a way to recuperate the value of natural knowledge, even though he has likened it to pagan learning and maintains its inferiority to Clergy. First, he indicts the narrator's impetuous behavior upon the mountain of Myddelerþe: "And so I seye by þee, þat sekest after þe whyes,/ And aresonedest Reson, a rebukynge as it were,/ And willest of briddes and of beestes and of hir bredyng knowe,/ Why some be alouȝ and some aloft, þi likyng it were" (B.12.216–19). In keeping with Reason's theme of "suffrance," Imaginatif lectures the narrator about the inappropriate orientation of his quest for knowledge. The reason that flowers wear "colours so clere and so brizte" and that animals behave with "breme wittes" is beyond the reach of human understanding, Imaginatif contends: "Clergie ne Kynde Wit ne knew neuere þe cause,/ Ac Kynde knoweþ þe cause hymself, no creature ellis" (B.12.221, 223–5). With this statement, Imaginatif reasserts God's place at the head of the natural world, reminding the narrator that achieving "kynde knowynge" also means knowing Kynde, that is, recognizing God as the origin and sustainer of all created life.

Having defended the order of nature, Imaginatif again makes possible a symbolic reading of natural phenomena, including the animals that had so troubled the narrator in B.11. Observations "of briddes and of bestes" may be spiritually useful, Imaginatif maintains, provided that they are understood as "[e]nsamples" and "termes" (B.12.236–7). To illustrate his point, he launches into an extended moralization of the peacock that mimics the technique of the bestiary even as some of its specific conclusions appear to

⁸⁵ Hanna, "Langland's Ymaginatif," p. 83.

⁸⁶ Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition*, p. 200.

veer away from established interpretations.⁸⁷ He begins with a brief resumé of the peacock's physical characteristics and behavioral traits: the "fairest fowel" but the "foulest" breeder, the peacock is also unable to fly (B.12.237).⁸⁸ The irony of the bird's glorious though useless feathers is a commonplace in bestiaries, encyclopedic descriptions, and moralized fables, which often treat the animal as an example of pride, but the detail of the peacock's unsavory breeding habits is more difficult to trace.⁸⁹ It may derive from Bartholomaeus's description of the male peacock's aggression toward its offspring: "þe þekok is a bride þat loueþ nouȝt his children, for þe male sechiþ out þe female and secheþ out hire eyren for to breke ham, þat he may so occupie hym þe more in his lecherye."⁹⁰ The narrator's assessment of avian nesting habits had not included these details, which amount to a disclosure that the bird's behavior is ruled by "lecherye" and not reason; Imaginatif, however, has provided a depiction that brings the peacock down to earth, so to speak, giving it both positive and negative traits, all of which can be made to bear exemplary meaning for human observers. As soon as Imaginatif begins to sketch out these natural observations, like the bestiary he quickly moves to fix their symbolic meaning. Providing an example of how to "read" animals, Imaginatif explains that peacocks "betokneþ" the rich: just as the birds are borne down by the weight of their showy tail feathers, so the rich are hampered spiritually by their wealth and possessions (B.12.239).⁹¹ In this

⁸⁷ Imaginatif's manipulation of bestiary lore is particularly appropriate in light of Mary Carruthers's argument about the faculty's association with memory in medieval cognitive theory. The bestiary was a mnemonic text, she claims, not "a natural history book so much as a reading-and-memory book, providing some of the 'common places,' the foundational blocks, of inventional mnemonics. The description of the creature is a *pictura*, and as one 'paints' its picture mentally from the description in the words, maxims are attached." See Carruthers, "Imaginatif, Memoria, and the 'Need for Critical Theory,'" p. 110. See also Beryl Rowland, "The Art of Memory and the Bestiary," in *Beasts and Birds of the Middle Ages: The Bestiary and Its Legacy*, ed. Willene B. Clark and Meredith T. McMunn (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), pp. 12–25.

⁸⁸ On the peacock's beauty, see Maura Nolan, "Aesthetics," in *A Handbook of Middle English Studies*, ed. Marion Turner (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2013), pp. 223–37.

⁸⁹ See Carmen Brown, "Bestiary Lessons on Pride and Lust," in *The Mark of the Beast*, ed. Hassig, pp. 61–2.

⁹⁰ Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, 12.32, p. 638.

⁹¹ In "*Piers Plouman* and the *Querelle*," Davis explores connections between the peacock's "tail" and "pennes" and concerns with obscenity and euphemism in the *Roman de la Rose*. That these potentially bawdy puns are excised from C reveals, Davis argues, an "increased seriousness in Langland's response to the *Natura plangens* tradition" from B to C that anticipates the fifteenth-century *querelle* (p. 85). Davis's argument that Imaginatif presents the "works of nature" as "beyond discussion" contrasts with my own view that Imaginatif models a moral reading of nature. On the peacock's tail and the problem of beauty and human sexuality, see Nolan, "Aesthetics," pp. 230–5.

manner, Imaginatif shows the narrator how natural facts can be translated into spiritual facts, making observations of nature serve a higher purpose.

Imaginatif further elaborates his description, noting that the peacock's "flessh is foul flessh, and his feet boþe,/ And vnlouelich of ledene and loop for to here" (B.12.242–3). The details of unpleasant flesh and voice are common to the bestiary tradition and can be traced to Isidore.⁹² The peacock's ugly feet are not described in the bestiary tradition, but appear in Bartholomaeus's encyclopedia, where he attributes the detail to Aristotle.⁹³ Continuing to convert natural observations into symbolic meaning, Imaginatif associates the peacock's ugly feet with the rich man's "[e]xecutours—false frendes that fulfille noȝt his wille" (B.12.257), and he attributes this meaning to "Auynet," the only source Imaginatif cites by name in the passage. "Auynet" is a reference to the French *Avionnet*, a translation of Avianus's fourth-century Latin fables, which were widely read throughout the Middle Ages as one of the standard elementary school-texts.⁹⁴ In fact, however, neither the Latin nor the French versions of the fable of the peacock concur with the details Imaginatif attributes to this source. In the lines that follow, Imaginatif mentions an unnamed poet, presumably again "Auynet," who "preueþ" that the peacock is esteemed only for its beautiful and valuable feathers, just as the friends of the rich care only for their wealth (B.12.259–60). In Avianus's fable of the Crane and the Peacock, the peacock mocks the crane for his comparatively lackluster appearance. The crane takes flight in response, calling down to the flightless peacock that his vaunted plumage is nothing but useless decoration.⁹⁵ It is possible to interpret the fable as a commentary on the vanity of worldly possessions, but nowhere does Avianus explicitly equate the peacock with the rich, nor does he describe the peacock's feet as "executours," a detail that remains untraced.⁹⁶

⁹² See *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* 12.7.48, ed. and trans. Stephen Barney et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁹³ Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, 12.32, p. 638.

⁹⁴ On the derivation of the title *Avionnet* from its author Avianus's name, compare the French fable collection *Ysopet* (from Aesop) and the grammatical handbook *Donet* (from Donatus). See *Ysopet-Avionnet: The Latin and French Texts*, ed. Kenneth McKenzie and William A. Oldfather, University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature 5 (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 1919). On Avianus in the schools, see Marc Boas, "De librorum catonianorum historia atque compositione," *Mnemosyne*, n.s. 42 (1914): pp. 17–46, and Mann, "He Knew Nat Catoun'."

⁹⁵ See Avianus, *Fabulae Aviani*, in *Minor Latin Poets*, ed. and trans. J. Wight Duff and Arnold M. Duff, Loeb Classical Library 434 (London: Heineman, 1935), 2.11–14, pp. 704–5: "Quamvis innumerus plumas variaverit ordo,/ mersus humi semper florida terga geris:/ ast ego deformi sublimis in aera penna/ proxima sideribus numinibusque feror."

⁹⁶ Alan Fletcher discusses contemporary moralizations of the peacock's feet in "The Hideous Feet of Langland's Peacock," *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 38 (1991), pp. 18–20. None

Imaginatif's description of the peacock's "foul flesh" (B.12.242) agrees with the bestiaries' accounts of the bird's virtually inedible flesh. However, while Langland seems to emphasize the bird's uselessness, both in terms of its inability to fly and its unsuitability as meat for consumption, authoritative accounts typically associate the bird with positive qualities. The bestiary, for example, cites Martial, who in his *Epigrams* highlights the splendor of the bird's "gleaming wings" and marvels that anyone would be so aesthetically insensitive as to hand over this glorious bird to a cook.⁹⁷ In *The City of God*, Augustine also reflects on the symbolic value of the peacock's incorruptible flesh, concluding that no power but God himself might keep the dead animal's flesh from decaying, and using it as a proof from nature that the human soul might live eternally.⁹⁸ In the *Aviarium*, Hugh of Fouillooy transforms the peacock's negative traits into positive symbolic reflections of the ideal clerical teacher. The bird's incorruptible flesh symbolizes "the minds of the teachers which neither the flame of passion burns, nor the heat of lust kindles."⁹⁹ Further, in Hugh's account the unpleasant voice noted by bestiarists becomes the admonishing tone of the "preacher [who] threatens sinners with the unquenchable fire of hell," and the "eye-like forms of the tail" signify the teacher's prescience concerning "what danger ultimately threatens each person."¹⁰⁰ Despite these positive associations, however, the peacock's association with pride is not entirely absent from Hugh's interpretation; like the teacher who falls prey to flattery, he warns, the peacock will lift his tail in pride, exposing his rear end: "thus that which is praised in the teacher's action is scorned in his

of these examples associates the feet with executors, and Fletcher concludes that the analogy might have been Langland's own (p. 20). Michael Van Dussen, "Parsing the Peacock: Langland's Wills and the Limits of *Voluntas*," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 25 (2011): pp. 77–94, argues that Langland develops an association between the peacock's ugly feet and false executors to expose the flaws of the testamentary system. Van Dussen's reading of the peacock's "taille" as a punning reference to the tallying stick, an instrument that makes record of debt, suggests that Langland's "testamentary moralization was not arbitrarily linked to the peacock" (p. 91).

⁹⁷ Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts*, p. 188: "Miraris quotiens gemmantis explicat alas,/ si potes hunc saevo tradere dura coco?" The bestiary quotes Martial, *Epigrammaton libri* 13.70 through Isidore, *Etymologiae* 12.7.48.

⁹⁸ Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans* 21.4, ed. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 1048–9.

⁹⁹ Hugh of Fouillooy, *The Medieval Book of Birds: Hugh of Fouillooy's Aviarium*, ed. and trans. Willene B. Clark, *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* 80 (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992), p. 249: "Tales sunt doctorum mentes quas nec flamma cupiditatis exurit, nec calor libidinis accendit."

¹⁰⁰ Hugh of Fouillooy, *Medieval Book of Birds*, p. 249: "Habet pavo vocem terribilem quando praedicator peccatoribus minatur inextinguibilem Gehennae ignem... Quod autem quasi oculos in cauda habet, ad hoc pertinet, ut quod unusquisque doctor praevidet quod periculum in fine singulis imminet."

pride. Therefore the peacock should carry its tail lowered, so that what the teacher does is done with humility."¹⁰¹

It seems, therefore, that Langland's peacock is an amalgam of details drawn not only from the bestiary tradition, but from a variety of encyclopedic sources, and then layered over with invention, rather as a medieval preacher might do when mining a bestiary for sermon exempla.¹⁰² By imitating the method of the bestiarist, Imaginatif demonstrates how natural knowledge might serve to benefit those who look at the "diuerse siztes" of this world (B.12.136). That Langland chooses the peacock for Imaginatif's exempla is particularly significant. A flightless bird, the peacock is a creature that cannot "stye up" from the earth to the heavens, as observers of nature are instructed to do in exemplarist texts; nor, with its inedible flesh, is it useful to humans as a food source. It is a creature that is purely ornamental, a thing of beauty that is simultaneously earthbound and yet without practical use. This image figures the "carnal reader"—indeed the incorruptible peacock is nothing but durable flesh—and yet Imaginatif teaches the narrator how to translate even this most resistant creature into spiritual meaning.

Although Langland's vision of nature in B.11 is a pessimistic one that first takes the form of the optimistic exemplarist meditation and then subverts it with the crisis of negative human exceptionality, Imaginatif's answer in B.12 begins to delineate a way back to a confident appraisal of nature's symbolic potential. As we have seen, the narrator's confrontation with the animal world prompts a fearful reassessment of the human place within nature; against the backdrop of "reasonable" animal behavior, human beings stand out as flawed, inadequate to the task of living well and meriting salvation. Finally, like the Samaritan's analogy of the hand that I discussed in this book's Introduction, Imaginatif's reading of the peacock exemplifies a way of "making sense" of nature that Middleton calls Langland's "poetics of interposition."¹⁰³ The Latin verb "interpono" means "to put between," "to place among," or "to interpose."¹⁰⁴ This activity is precisely what Imaginatif models when he moralizes the peacock. While the narrator had seen the bird as only one of many creatures whose activities awed and perplexed him, Imaginatif offers a way of

¹⁰¹ Hugh of Fouillois, *Medieval Book of Birds*, pp. 249–50: "Cum autem cauda erigitur, posteriora nudantur, et sic quod laudatur in opere, deridetur in elatione. Oportet igitur ut pavo caudam submissam gerat ut quod doctor agit cum humilitate fiat."

¹⁰² See Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, pp. 195–209.

¹⁰³ Middleton, "Narration and the Invention of Experience," p. 110.

¹⁰⁴ Charlton T. Lewis, *A Latin Dictionary Founded on Andrews' Edition of Freund's Latin Dictionary* [= "Lewis and Short"] (1879; reprint, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), s.v. "interpono."

making animals meaningful in relation to human spiritual concerns. In this sense, Imaginatif completes a double interposition, demonstrating how non-human creatures can be brought into the symbolic and spiritual realm of humankind, and re-placing the human within the larger world of creation. While the Vision of Kynde features the narrator's struggle to comprehend human exceptionality in nature, and a particularly *negative* impression of the burden of that exceptionality, Imaginatif's interpretation of the peacock reintegrates human and animal. This achievement is not meant to blur the traditional hierarchy that presupposes human dominion and superiority in creation, but rather to assuage the narrator's feelings of isolation and helplessness when he perceives that Reason cares for "alle beestes/ Saue man and his make" (B.11.369–70). In the coming passūs, the narrator will continue to contend with the related problems of free will, human sin, and suffering, issues for which Imaginatif offers no answers. But Imaginatif's image of the beautiful peacock and the symbolic lessons it embodies serves to reassure the narrator, as well as Langland's readers, that the natural world can be both a source of aesthetic pleasure and wonder as well as an "ensample" of spiritual significance (B.11.324).

ANIMA'S NAMES AND ENCYCLOPEDIC CAPACITY

In B.15 the narrator finally reaches an encounter with his soul in the figure of Anima. Despite the lessons of Patience and his observations of Haukyn in the previous two passūs, the narrator remains disoriented and alienated from his natural faculties: "Ac after my wakyng it was wonder longe/ Er I koude kyndely knowe what was Dowel," he confesses at the beginning of B.15. "And so my wit weex and wanyed til I a fool weere" (B.15.1–3). This admission indicates that the narrator still does not possess the knowledge he desires, to know Dowel "kyndely," and suggests that the disposition with which he began the "inner journey" has not changed substantively despite the encounters with Fortune, Kynde, Imaginatif, and others. His mental state here recalls how he was similarly "witlees nerhande" upon waking at the beginning of B.13 (B.13.1). At each moment of transition, the narrator is unable to assimilate the lessons of his visions to waking life, as at the end of the Vision of Kynde in C he recognizes that "[s]lepyng hadde Y grace/ To wyte what Dowel is, ac wakyng neuere!" (C.13.217–18). Frustrated and rendered senseless as the definitions of Dowel are multiplied with each new encounter, the narrator explains that he raves "in pat folie" until Reason takes pity and brings him to the comfort of sleep once more (B.15.10–11).

I propose that the narrator's encounter with Anima presents a decisive turn in his quest for "kynde knowynge," which I define as an integrated knowledge of creator and creation, of self and world. Following his confrontation with the soul, at the poem's inmost psychic depth, the narrator's gaze can begin to move outward once again to gain a conspectus that had not been possible in the foregoing episodes. Here he recognizes himself as he is *in the world*—unable to see Christ "but as myself in a mirour" (B.15.162). In this passus, as in the encounter with Imaginatif, Langland deploys encyclopedic learning even as he censures the narrator's encyclopedic aspirations, a desire that the narrator must confront and redirect before fully recognizing his place in the larger scheme of *kynde*.

The encounter with Anima begins again in diversity. Anima introduces himself with a long resumé of names, a list based roughly upon Isidore's definition of the soul in the *Etymologiae*, quoted at B.15.39a. Anima's self-description is encyclopedic even on a formal level, for like the encyclopedias' presentation of one authority after another, and like the poem's assemblage of the varied meanings of Dowel, Anima announces his names serially, presenting a list of overlapping definitions. Bartholomaeus's exposition begins by acknowledging what Trevisa calls the "diuers and as it were contrarie domes" [that is, judgments or determinations] regarding the definition of the soul (3.4: 93). In gathering these varied opinions together in one place, Bartholomaeus provides a textbook example of encyclopedic *compilatio*. He begins by intermingling Christian and pagan definitions of the nature of the soul and its relationship to the body, and then proceeds to parse these theories more closely. First, he cites the views of pagan authorities such as Aristotle, Pythagoras, and Hippocrates, among others.¹⁰⁵ Remarking on the lack of consensus among these philosophers, however, he then summarizes the properties of the soul according to Christian authorities:

Sep þat wise men spekeþ in so many maner wise and so diuersliche
of þe soule, at þis tyme onliche þis schal suffice þat is iseide of holy
men, þat the soule is a maner spiritual and resonable substaunce þat
God made of noȝt for to ȝeue lif and perfectioun to mannes body.¹⁰⁶

Yet, while he privileges the views of Christian "holy men," Bartholomaeus does not condemn or dismiss the pagan definitions; rather, with a move characteristic of the encyclopedic mindset, he *enlarges* his definition of the soul. For the soul, he says, is of such a substance that many definitions are

¹⁰⁵ See M.C. Seymour et al., *Bartholomaeus Anglicus and His Encyclopedia* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum, 1992), pp. 49–53.

¹⁰⁶ Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, 3.4, pp. 93–4.

needed to describe its many capacities and functions, a sentiment that the American poet of nature Walt Whitman would later echo. Speaking as a kind of world-soul, the “En Masse,” Whitman writes: “Do I contradict myself?/ Very well then I contradict myself,/ (I am large, I contain multitudes.)” Bartholomaeus likewise embraces contradiction in his description of the soul’s capaciousness:

And for he [the soul] is substauns he may fonge contraries . . . Also þey he be simple and noȝt changeabil in his substaunce, he haþ many maner myȝt and vertu . . . And so it is iknowe þat þe soule haþ many maner propirtes and diffiniciouns, towchinge what þing þe soule is.¹⁰⁷

From here Bartholomaeus proceeds to offer his readers a sampling of these “propirtes and diffiniciouns” by citing Isidore’s description of the soul’s names, the same passage that Langland rehearses in B.15/C.16. These names render the soul’s capacities “more clere iknowe,” Bartholomaeus suggests, by aligning the soul’s names with its numerous functions. As Isidore states: “Pro efficientiis enim causarum diversa nomina sortita est anima” [Different terms have been allotted to the soul according to the effects of its causes].¹⁰⁸ Trevisa’s Middle English translation of Bartholomaeus’s citation of Isidore bears comparison with Langland’s own Englishing of Isidore in B.15. Table 3.1 presents a summary of the soul’s names in each of the three works.

Initially, Langland appears to have followed Isidore more closely than Bartholomaeus did, for he translates all nine of the soul’s names given in the *Etymologiae*, while Bartholomaeus omits “memoria,” “amor,” and “conscien-cia.” Yet Bartholomaeus’s citations, and consequently Trevisa’s Middle English renderings, are generally more direct than Langland’s imaginative exposition. Some of Langland’s translations are straightforward: “vult” becomes “wilne and wolde” and “wille”; “rectum iudicat” becomes “deme domes . . . as truþe techep” and “demeth riȝtfulliche”; and “sentit” is simply “feele” and “felip” in the Middle English renderings. But Langland becomes most inventive in translating the names that Bartholomaeus omits. For example, Isidore presents the operation of *memoria* with the verb “recolere,” “to recall or recollect”; Langland describes this function as the soul’s capacity to “make mone to God” (B.15.26), a gloss suggested by the primary meaning of the word “recolere” as “to cultivate.” The term initially indicates an agricultural activity—to till a field—but, by extension, one may also cultivate one’s

¹⁰⁷ Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, 3.4, p. 94.

¹⁰⁸ Isidore, *Etymologiae sive origines*, ed. W.M. Lindsay, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911), XI.1.12–13. Translation from *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. Stephen A. Barney et al., p. 231.

Table 3.1 A summary of the soul's names in the *Etymologiae*, *Piers Plowman*, and *De proprietatibus rerum*

	Isidore's <i>Etymologiae</i>	<i>Piers Plowman</i>	Trevisa's <i>De proprietatibus rerum</i>
Anima	vivificat corpus	quykke þe cors	while he is in þe body and zeueþ it lif
Animus	vult	wilne and wolde	while he haþ wille
Mens	scit	kan and knowe	while he haþ mynde
Memoria	recolit	make mone to God	<i>omitted</i>
Racio	rectum iudicat	deme domes and do as trube techeþ	while he demeth riȝtfulliche
Sensus	sentit	feele þat folk telleþ	feliþ
Amor	amat	loue leelly Oure Lord and alle oþere	<i>omitted</i>
Conscientia	negat vel consentit	chalange or chalange noȝt, chepe or refuse	<i>omitted</i>
Spiritus	spirat	flee fro þe flessch	breeþeþ

soul, a notion well known in the penitential tradition.¹⁰⁹ Langland suggests that in exercising the memory human beings sift through the dense terrain of their souls by a process of reflection, leading to prayer ("mone").

The powers ascribed to Conscience are another Langlandian innovation. While Bartholomaeus omits the Latin "conscientia," Langland's initial description seems to follow Isidore closely: he translates "negat vel consentit" as "chalange or chalange noȝt, chepe or refuse" (B.15.31). But Langland's diction specifies the function of Conscience in ways that Isidore's general terms do not: "chalange," "chepe," and "refuse" evoke more specific, *worldly* circumstances of the clerical and mercantile sphere, suggesting in the first instance an academic debate or legal trial, and in the second, the marketplace of buyers and sellers. Langland elaborates Conscience's role in the next line: "Thanne am I Conscience ycalled, Goddes clerk and his notarie" (B.15.32). Langland's depiction of Conscience concretizes the concept by placing it in an everyday setting, putting it into practice somewhere among the trades and negotiations of the "fair feeld ful of folk." Likewise, "sensus," the soul's power to feel ("sentit"), is hailed as "wit and wisdom, þe welle of alle craftes," an added description that connects this aspect of the soul with Kynde Wit, who is associated with the foundation of "craftes" in the Prologue (B.15.30, B.Pr.118). Langland's license with Isidore's definitions is therefore greater than a

¹⁰⁹ See Stephen A. Barney, "The Plowshare of the Tongue: The Progress of a Symbol from the Bible to *Piers Plowman*," *Mediaeval Studies* 35 (1973): pp. 261–93.

simple comparison of terms suggests. For even when the initial translation coincides (as “sentit” and “feele”), Langland builds new analogies onto the traditional definitions (e.g. conscience is a “notary”) and brings Anima’s roles to life as distinct allegorical characters in their own right. In the C-text, Langland adds another name to the Latin paraphrase of Isidore: “*dum declinat de malo ad bonum, Liberum Arbitrium est.*” Indeed, in C, *Liberum Arbitrium*, one of the soul’s many names, emerges as a full-blown personification, taking charge as the primary spokesperson for the soul in this episode, while Anima becomes an auxiliary name, one of the soul’s many “hats,” as it were. Langland’s creative addition to Isidore’s definition demonstrates the improvisational method by which he incorporates authoritative texts, making poetry out of scholastic ideas; more specifically, Langland’s practice here mimics encyclopedic inclusivity.

Anima, like Langland, deploys an encyclopedic text, but at once reveals its dangerous association with curiosity and “[c]ouetise to konne” (B.15.62). Having laid out a snare for the inquisitive narrator, Anima invites him to choose how he “coueite[th] to calle me” (B.15.39). The narrator, as if “playing along” (“al bourdyng þat tyme,” B.15.40), responds with an analogy of his own, comparing Anima to bishops who likewise wield a variety of names that correspond to their various episcopal functions. As if anxious to prove that he recognizes Anima’s encyclopedic mode, the narrator’s response is not only a type of formal distinction, but in fact draws upon Gratian’s *Decretum*, the grand compendium of canon law. “[N]ow I se þi wille!” Anima declares, springing the trap. “Thow woldest knowe and konne þe cause of alle hire names,/ And of myne, if þow myȝtest, me þynkeþ by þi speche!” (B.15.45–6). “Ye, sire,” the narrator responds with all the enthusiasm of naive self-incrimination: “Alle þe sciences vnder sonne and alle þe sotile craftes/ I wolde I knewe and koupe kyndely in myn herte!” (B.15.47–9). Anima’s response indicates that while the desire to know “kyndely” is a natural appetite, it can in fact become an unnatural desire to know what God knows: “It were ayeins kynde,” Anima asserts, “and alle kynnes reson/ That any creature sholde konne al, except Crist oone” (B.15.52–3). Anima adduces the example of Lucifer who, spurred by a “lust and likyng” to be as wise as God, sought to usurp God’s place and consequently “fel from heuene” (B.15.50–1a). As Lucifer challenged God, so also, Anima warns, the narrator’s aspirations to “konne al” set him “ayeins kynde,” that is, not only against his own nature as a fallible human being, but also against the creator Kynde himself. In order to steer the narrator away from the dangers of such presumption, Anima follows Imaginatif’s prescription of long-established texts, urging the narrator to abandon speculation in “materes vnmesurable” and focus his study on authoritative interpretations and the basic tenets of

faith: "Bettre bileuen were, by manye doctors, swich techyng,/ And tellen men þe ten comaundementz, and touchen þe seuene synnes" (B.15.71, 73–4). Finally, indicating the outward turn that his speech initiates, Anima urges the narrator to cease his idle collection of experiences and observations and instead turn his knowledge of Dowel into action in the world.¹¹⁰ "And þe moore þat a man of good matere hereþ,/ But he do þerafter it doop hym double scape," Anima warns. "'Beatus est,' seiþ Seint Bernard, 'qui scripturas legit/ Et verba vertit in opera fulliche to his power'" (B.15.58–61). The remainder of this long passus, which I explore further in Chapter 5, elaborates the importance of transforming words into matching deeds, especially for the literate, "qui scripturas legit." Like Imaginatif's translation of the peacock, Langland's rehearsal of Anima's names in the opening lines of the passus can be understood as a model of legitimate learning, for his accumulation of definitions is not idly made, but each name corresponds to a real function, an activity put into practice for the good of humankind and in proper regard for God's unifying role as creator and container of all diversities.

SEEING ONESELF IN NATURE

As I will explore in the final two chapters of this book, beginning with the narrator's confrontation with Anima in B.15, the poem's concerns return again outward to the social world, where it had begun. Having traveled to the depths of self-knowledge, the narrator is made ready for the discovery of his own complicity in human sinfulness in the Tree of Charity episode of the following passus. As in the *De planctu* when the poet learns that *he* is part of the reason for the unsightly tear in Natura's garment, so in B.16 the narrator fully begins to recognize himself in nature and to understand that he is himself part of the human rebellion against Kynde's law that he witnesses in B.11. In this respect, *Piers Plowman* proceeds by what we might call a telescoping narrative as the narrator moves between positions of observation and participation. When the poem begins, the narrator surveys the "fair feeld ful of folk" from a distance; then, guided by Wit, he tours the human body and its faculties, acquiring a close-up view of *Caro*; next, becoming a participant in that body, the narrator travels with Fortune and enjoys the delights of her company, as well as the pain of her departure; afterwards, the narrator is

¹¹⁰ This turn to action coincides with Mann's observation that in the Anima episode "many nouns converge on an underlying unity, which is verbal not nominal. The noun is dissolved into the verb" ("Langland and Allegory," p. 22).

again made to stand apart and observe creation, as he had done in the poem's prologue, when Kynde places him upon a mountaintop so far removed from everyday human experience that the narrator fails to recognize himself as a part of the creation that he beholds; finally, in B.16, the narrator returns to his body and experiences the full force of his humanity, his *kynde*, when he repeats the originary sin of Adam and Eve by asking Piers to "pulle adoun an appul" (B.16.73). As the scope of the narrator's vision expands and contracts throughout the poem, Langland explores how man as microcosm comes to know his place in the macrocosm and God as the source of both.

4

Beyond Measure

Langland's Law of *Kynde*

[N]atura dictat homini ut non faciat aliis quod sibi non vult fieri.
[Nature commands man that he should not do to others that which
he would not wish to be done to him.]

Alan of Lille, *Distinctiones*¹

Conforte hem wiþ þi catel for Cristes loue of heuene;
Loue hem and lene hem—so lawe of kynde wolde:
Alter alterius onera portate.
[Bear ye one another's burdens.]

Piers Plowman B.6.220–1a

Ye legisteres and lawieres, if I lye witeþ Mathew:
Quodcumque vultis vt faciant vobis homines, facite eis.
[Whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also
to them.]

Piers Plowman B.7.59–a

In this chapter my focus shifts from the epistemological allegory of the narrator's inner dream to the urgent ethical questions posed throughout the poem in the narrator's encounters with political community. But even as the poem turns outward, as we saw in Chapter 3, its categories of interior and exterior are not separate, fixed realms, but merge and bear consequences for one another. The interior law that this chapter takes as its subject is a direct product of the divine intimacy with creation that we have traced in this book's foregoing chapters. As God in the guise of *Kynde* oversees the provision of the physical world, he has also ordained *in nature* a universal law to guide human moral and ethical behavior. Holy Church proclaims the interiority of the divine law in the poem's opening passus: Truth, she says, "is a kynde knowynge þat kenneþ in þyn

¹ Alan of Lille, *Distinctiones*, PL 210: 871.

herte/ For to louen þi Lord leuere þan þiselue" and "[n]o dedly synne to do" (B.1.142–4). In describing truth as *kynde*, Holy Church evokes the medieval discourse of natural law, which asserts that human beings possess an innate ability to comprehend immutable moral and ethical precepts through the use of natural reason. This chapter argues that Langland engages the medieval discourse of natural law in his formulation of a "lawe of kynde" as an intuitive knowledge of truth, which is, as Paul states in a passage that would become the foundation of the Christian tradition of natural law, inscribed in the human heart: "Cum enim gentes, quae legem non habent, naturaliter ea quae legis sunt faciunt, eiusmodi legem non habentes, ipsi sibi sunt lex; qui ostendunt opus legis scriptum in cordibus suis" [For when the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature those things that are of the law, these having not the law are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts (Romans 2:14–15)]. The discourse of natural law is another of the "books of nature" that informs Langland's vision of *kynde* and, like the concept of the book of nature itself, the idea of natural law is based on an alternative textuality, a truth that is, in theory, accessible to all.

This chapter elucidates the workings of the natural law in *Piers Plowman* by examining the speeches of Hunger, who first articulates the "lawe of kynde" and links it to love of neighbor, and Trajan, whose testimony advocates a law tempered by love and "leaute," a term that I argue envisions an improvisational jurisprudence evocative of the developing uses of equity in the Chancery court during this period. The "lawe of kynde," and its related formulation as the "lawe of loue," suspends the course of strict justice and, as we shall see, often stands in opposition to codified and institutional forms of law. By prompting its adherents to consider the need of another, the "lawe of kynde," like the biblical golden rule with which it is associated, appropriates the structure of justice as reciprocity—a balanced exchange of outcome for action—to turn judgment on its head by bringing the claims of the one to be judged to bear upon the decision of the one who judges. While the discourse of justice extols ideals of balance, moderation, and impartiality, the "lawe of kynde" reveals within justice a place for disproportion, surplus, and personal response.

DEFINITIONS OF NATURAL LAW

The subject of the law in *Piers Plowman* reveals its author's wide-ranging and imaginative engagement with contemporary legal terminologies, procedures, principles, and controversies. Linguistic and thematic studies

have confirmed the poem's extraordinary engagement with legal discourse, while manuscript studies have established the poem's earliest audiences within the bureaucratic circles peopled by similarly legal-minded readers and writers.² It is possible that Langland was himself a legal clerk who labored in a bureaucratic capacity by day, gaining the knowledge of proceedings at Westminster that is so apparent in his poetry. Studies of law in *Piers Plowman* have described the poem's strategic "citation" of legal discourse, even identifying specific fourteenth-century statutes with which the poem engages.³ In exploring Langland's "lawe of kynde," however, I emphasize the theoretical character of natural law. The law of nature was not codified, indeed, by definition could not be codified, and it is not typically cited in legal documents of the period.⁴ But although natural law has no practical application in fourteenth-century law, its influence on the *idea* of law is considerable. From its Stoic roots, to its definition in both civil and canon law books, and, later, to Thomas Aquinas's development of the concept of *synderesis* as the innate capacity to distinguish right from wrong based on the operation of natural reason, natural law remains an important principle in legal and theological treatises throughout the medieval period.⁵

² On Langland's use of legal diction and procedures, see Rudolf Kirk, "References to the Law in *Piers Plowman*," *PMLA* 48 (1933): pp. 322–7; Alford, "*Piers Plowman*": *A Glossary of Legal Diction*, and Anna Baldwin, *The Theme of Government in "Piers Plowman"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). On Langland's legal milieu, see Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Steven Justice, "Langlandian Reading Circles and the Civil Service in London and Dublin, 1380–1427," in *New Medieval Literatures* 1 (1997): pp. 59–84; Kerby-Fulton, "Professional Readers of Langland at Home and Abroad: New Directions in the Political and Bureaucratic Codicology of *Piers Plowman*," in *New Directions in Later Medieval Manuscript Studies: Essays from the 1998 Harvard Conference*, ed. Derek Pearsall (York: York Medieval Press, 2000), pp. 103–29; and, recently, Linne R. Mooney and Estelle Stubbs, *Scribes and the City* (York: York Medieval Press, 2013), who offer some evidence that Langland's earliest scribes may have been Guildhall clerks. The following studies helpfully discuss the broader metaphorical and structural significance of law in the poem: Birnes, "Christ as Advocate"; Myra Stokes, *Justice and Mercy in "Piers Plowman": A Reading of the B-text Visio* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); Middleton, "Acts of Vagrancy"; and Galloway, "*Piers Plowman* and the Subject of the Law," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 15 (2001): pp. 117–40.

³ See especially Middleton, "Acts of Vagrancy."

⁴ On the judicial uses of natural law, see Norman Doe, *Fundamental Authority in Late Medieval English Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 70–4.

⁵ On the scope of the medieval tradition of natural law, see D.E. Luscombe, "Natural Morality and Natural Law," in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism 1100–1600*, ed. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 705–15. On the contributions of Ockham and the Franciscan poverty debates, see Brian Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights: Studies on Natural Rights, Natural Law, and Church Law 1150–1625* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001).

Universality and accessibility are the hallmarks of natural law. The ancient Stoics developed the idea of a single law of nature based on the pantheistic belief that divine reason permeates nature and dwells within all created things.⁶ Building on these foundations, later Christian formulations likewise assert the eternal and immutable character of natural law, for God himself is nature's creator and providential law-giver.⁷ Gratian's *Decretum*, the twelfth-century compendium of canon law, equates natural law with divine law and affirms its biblical foundation: "Humanum genus duobus regitur, naturali uidelicet iure et moribus" [Mankind is ruled by two laws: natural law and custom].⁸ Gratian specifically associates natural law with the golden rule of Matthew 7: 12: "Ius naturae est, quod in lege et euangelio continetur, quo quisque iubetur alii facere, quod sibi uult fieri, et prohibetur alii inferre, quod sibi nolit fieri" [The law of nature is that which is contained in the Law and the Gospel, according to which every person is commanded to do to others that which he wishes to be done to himself, and is forbidden to inflict upon others that which he would not wish to be done to himself].⁹ Here Gratian unites the moral and ethical content of the two testaments, while his paraphrase of the golden rule recalls the instinctive, personal, and extratextual foundations of natural law tradition.¹⁰ Though dually rooted in the Mosaic law and in Christ's law, the natural law as golden rule is theoretically accessible to anyone who is able to consider "quod sibi uult fieri" [that which he wishes to be done to himself]. As I will explore below, Langland also links the "lawe of kynde" with Matthew's golden rule, suggesting his familiarity with the tradition defined by canon law.

But not every theorist of natural law agreed that a single law of nature applied to all of creation or that such a law was capable of conveying moral and ethical value to human beings. The Roman jurist Ulpian defined natural law as a force that governs all animals including human beings, directing them to the preservation and procreation of their kind. This

⁶ See Gerard Verbeke, *The Presence of Stoicism in Medieval Thought* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1983), pp. 8–16, and Michael Lapidge, "The Stoic Inheritance," in *A History of Twelfth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Peter Dronke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 81–112.

⁷ On the universality of natural law, see A.P. D'Entreves, *Natural Law: An Introduction to Legal Philosophy* (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1951), pp. 17–32.

⁸ All citations of the *Decretum* refer to the *Corpus iuris canonici*, 2 vols., ed. Emil Ludwig Richter, with revisions by Emil Friedberg (Leipzig, 1879; reprint Graz: Akademische Druck, U. Verlagsanstalt, 1959), I: 1.

⁹ *Corpus iuris canonici*, I: 1.

¹⁰ The ethical content of the golden rule does in fact bridge both testaments, a point that Christ himself voices in Matthew 7: 12 when he affirms that "haec est enim lex et prophetae" [this is the law and the prophets]. See Wattles, *The Golden Rule*.

view, which underlies Natura's increasingly diminished status in the allegorical tradition, confines the scope of natural law to the essential biological functions and instincts, rather than allowing its consequence for ethical or spiritual development, as Stoic and some later Christian formulations did.¹¹ Other jurists and theologians maintained, however, that the *ius naturale* was a consequence of natural reason and therefore reserved its precepts for human beings alone.¹² Aquinas validates both interpretations of the law, granting that human beings obey instinctive inclinations, like other animals, and that the unique nature of human beings requires their adherence to a special law, the dictates of which are accessible to human reason and have the power to bring human beings closer to God. Through participation in the "ratio aeterna" of God the rational creature is guided by a natural inclination "ad debitum actum et finem" [to its proper actions and ends], Aquinas writes: "Et talis participatio legis aeternae in rationali creatura lex naturalis dicitur" [And such a participation of the eternal law in a rational creature is called the natural law].¹³

This identification of natural law with the divine law of the creator established its priority and supremacy over all other forms of law.¹⁴ Both civil and canon lawyers described the natural law as an unwritten principle that provided the basis for positive law and to which all forms of positive law owed their legitimacy. Gratian, for example, invalidates any positive law that conflicts with the natural law: "Dignitate uero ius naturale simpliciter preualet consuetudini et constitutioni. Quaecunque enim uel moribus recepta sunt, uel scriptis comprehensa, si naturali iuri fuerint aduersa, uana et irrita sunt habenda." [Indeed natural law absolutely prevails in dignity over customs and constitutions. For whatever has either been received by customs or transmitted in writings, if it should contradict natural law, it must be considered worthless and void].¹⁵ According to this tradition, natural law comprises the moral knowledge accessible to human reason, and the instinctive human capacity to distinguish right from wrong becomes the essence of all positive, written laws. Much of the power and continuing influence of natural law rests with its capacity to circumvent, and potentially to reform, institutionalized laws and customs, a capacity, I propose, that defines Langland's attraction to it.

¹¹ White summarizes the Ulpianic controversy in *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*, pp. 20–39.

¹² See, for example, Albert the Great, *Super Ethica*, discussed by Luscombe, "Natural Morality and Natural Law," p. 709.

¹³ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3rd ed., 5 vols (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1961–5), II: p. 592. Luscombe, "Natural Morality and Natural Law," provides a helpful summary of Aquinas's definition of natural law, pp. 709–13. See also Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 244–9.

¹⁴ See d'Entreves, *Natural Law*, p. 34.

¹⁵ *Corpus iuris canonici*, I: 13.

In *Piers Plowman*, the “law of kynde” operates in two distinct, but overlapping realms, a dichotomy that reflects the division in the natural law tradition itself. First, the “lawe of kynde” is a general law implicit in the operations of the natural world and natural principles. This law bespeaks a cosmological order that is interconnected and interdependent in its parts and, crucially, ordained by God to provide for every creature’s needs. As we shall see, when immoderate consumption and other human transgressions disrupt this divinely established balance, natural justice restores proportionality, often with harsh penalties not only for those who have violated the law, but for bystanders as well. In its enforcement of moderation and balance, the law of nature in this account accords with traditional properties of Natura, who, for example, according to Alan of Lille, binds the universe together with “concordi stabilita nodo” [a stable and harmonious bond] (7: 10). Because this aspect of the “lawe of kynde” describes a universal law of nature, it pertains to human and non-human creation alike, drawing together all of creation under one law. The “lawe of kynde” in this guise sometimes serves as a reminder of the baser and purely physical aspects of creaturely existence, including the bodily needs and urges to which human beings, like their non-human animal counterparts, are subject. We have seen a good example of the association of *kynde* with instinct in the previous chapter when Reason warns Will that every person sins: “For man was maad of swich a matere he may noȝt wel asterte/ That som tyme hym bitit to folwen his kynde” (B.11.400–1). Hugh White refers to Langland’s occasional association of *kynde* with the frailties of the flesh as the “darker side of *kynde*,” and rightly observes that it calls into question the “credentials” of the “*lawe of kynde* . . . as a moral guide.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, as I will emphasize here, Langland suggests that even instinctive bodily desires—like hunger and thirst and, potentially, even the sexual instinct—direct human beings to moral and ethical action that enables participation in the divine.¹⁷

The second manifestation of natural law in the poem more precisely concerns the ethical behavior of human beings who have a law particular to their *kynde*. Like the larger creation of which it is a part, human life is fundamentally interdependent: each individual bears an obligation to other human beings, the precise terms of which vary according to the relationship between given individuals. Langland describes these ethical obligations as “*kynde*,” indicating their basis in the duties traditionally

¹⁶ White, *Nature and Salvation*, pp. 89–91.

¹⁷ See Mann, “Eating and Drinking.” On Langland’s positive representation of procreative sexuality in marriage, see Tavormina, *Kindly Similitude*; Davis, “*Piers Plowman* and the *Querelle*,” and my discussion in Chapter 2.

demanding by kinship.¹⁸ While human beings ought to observe moderation in matters of consumption—and thereby conform to the larger pattern of creation that Will observes from Myddelerþe—the “lawe of kynde” that regulates human ethical behavior promotes not moderation but *excess*, an outpouring analogous to God’s self-revealing activity as creator and his extension of grace as savior. In behaving “kyndely,” then, human beings participate in God’s plenitude, a quality I described in Chapter 2 as the basis for Langland’s representation of God in the figure Kynde. In *kynde*, human beings aspire to an ethical standard based on charity and mercy rather than strict justice, or worse, indifference.

As we saw in the previous chapter’s discussion of B.11’s Vision of Kynde, human beings are exceptional in creation and yet still part of the larger creation. Because of this dual status, human life is subject to both of the laws of nature that I have outlined above. But in order fully to follow the law of *their* “kynde,” human beings must exercise the uniquely human capacities of reason and free will. Langland depicts the basis of human exceptionality in B.9 when Wit describes God’s endowment of humankind with a rational soul. God exerts a special effort when he creates humans in his own image, for “þoruȝ þe word þat he spak woxen forþ beestes” (B.9.32), but the creation of human beings involves a divine craft that surpasses creation by God’s word alone: “He most werche wiþ his word and his wit shewe./ And in þis manere was man maad þoruȝ myȝt of God almyȝty,/ Wiþ his word and werkmanshipe and wiþ lif to laste” (B.9.43–5). The soul imparted by God’s special “werkmanshipe” entails not only the great promise of “lif to laste,” but also, as Anima himself later explains, the exclusively human capacity “to wilne and wolde,” that is, to make moral choices through the exercise of free will (B.15.24). So while the “lawe of kynde,” like truth, sits within the *kynde* human heart, knowledge of this law does not immediately and seamlessly translate to right action in the way that the bird’s natural instinct silently produces its wondrously designed nest (B.11.345–9). In Langland’s presentation of natural law, the “lawe of kynde” governing moral and ethical human behavior is based on the greater law of nature and issues from the same fundamental principles that govern the operation of the natural world, especially the rules of balance and moderation; however, because human beings do not act by unthinking instinct alone, the law of nature pertaining to human behavior appears unsteady, in contrast to the apparently effortless and linear unfolding of non-human animal life.

¹⁸ See, for example, White, *Nature and Salvation*, pp. 89–111; Galloway, “From *Gratitudo* to ‘Kyndenese,’” especially his discussion of *Piers Plowman*, pp. 378–82; and Tavormina, *Kindly Similitude*.

For human beings, who alone in creation can be understood as free agents, and thus, can alone be said to have moral obligations, *kynde* is a moral law requiring choice, an openness to contingency that makes human life vulnerable to sin. And yet, as I will argue throughout this chapter and the next, free will also gives the “lawe of kynde” its power in the human social sphere. Although Gratian phrases the golden rule as a command, the duty to bear one another’s burdens becomes apparent and urgent only when an individual stops to consider “quod sibi uult fieri” [that which he wishes to be done to himself] and “quod sibi nolit fieri” [that which he would not wish to be done to himself].¹⁹ Put another way, if free will complicates the simplicity of natural law as it operates in animal life, it is the ability to imagine, to sympathize, and to choose that makes human moral goodness possible at all.

The natural condition of human beings is in Langland’s view paradoxically characterized by both a fundamental plenitude, which it shares at least in theory with the broader creation, and an operative lack or deficiency necessitated by the uniquely human capacity for free choice and sin. As Patience explains in a passage to which I shall return in Chapter 5, God gives nothing life without at the same time creating a means for its livelihood: “For lent neuere was pere lif but liflode were shapen,/ Wherof or wherfore and wherby to libbe” (B.14.40–1). To support his claim, Patience presents evidence from the animal world: the “wilde worm vnder weet erpe,” the “[f]issh . . . in þe flood, and in þe fir þe criket,” the bird “of þe eyr,” and “bestes by gras and by greyn and by grene rootes” demonstrate the perfect integration of living creatures with the greater creation, each creature placed in an element where it thrives (B.14.42–5). Yet here again Patience raises the problem that the narrator had confronted in B.11 when he views creation from Middelerpe. How does human life fit within the greater natural law that governs the rest of creation? Patience’s speech claims that God has provided for all of creation, and demonstrates this provision with an exemplary catalogue of non-human creatures and their corresponding environments, producing a conflict between this picture of natural sufficiency and the narrator’s observation, at points throughout the poem, that human need is manifest. The coexistence of ordered plenitude and chaotic deficiency in nature remains a fundamental tension in Langland’s theory of *kynde*. To examine how this tension is poetically and ethically productive for Langland, we can turn now to Hunger’s appearance on Piers’s half-acre. Even as he punishes wasters and

¹⁹ *Corpus iuris canonici*, I: 1.

bystanders alike, Hunger defines the “lawe of kynde” as a law of mercy, linking its naturally felt precepts to a specifically Christian ethical code.

“LOUE HEM AND LAKKE HEM NOȝT”:
THE LESSONS OF HUNGER AND NEED

Set at the crossroads of allegory and history, the plowing of Piers’s half-acre imagines the best that society can be, a field of plenty tilled by communal labor, and it imagines the breakdown of that ideal in practice: when Waster refuses to work, the potential sufficiency of Piers’s plot becomes a site of dearth.²⁰ Piers’s conflict with the wasters who refuse to participate in the communal labor of plowing the half-acre embodies the two faces of Langland’s “lawe of kynde.” In its doubled vision of nature’s value, the episode exemplifies Nicolette Zeeman’s observation that *kynde* is “a place of ‘having’ and ‘not having.’”²¹ The half-acre encompasses both possibilities—nature provides, and nature fails.²² With Hunger’s arrival on the half-acre, the law of nature first emerges as natural justice: those who do not work do not eat (cf. 2 Thess 3: 10), and must endure the resulting pain of going hungry.²³ But Hunger also teaches Piers to observe another “lawe of kynde” that is rooted in mercy and that passes over the imperative of measure to err on the side of excess.²⁴

The idea of measure in relation to earthly goods is central to Langland’s ethics of economy and underlies the promise of natural sufficiency glimpsed momentarily upon Piers’s half-acre. As Holy Church explains in B.1, God ordained the land to provide for human life. But as the

²⁰ On the tension between allegorical idealism and historical contingency, see Kathleen M. Hewett-Smith, “Allegory on the Half-Acre: The Demands of History,” *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 10 (1996): pp. 1–22, and “‘Nede ne hath no lawe’: Poverty and the Destabilization of Allegory in the Final Visions of *Piers Plowman*,” in *Piers Plowman: A Book of Essays*, ed. Hewett-Smith (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 233–53.

²¹ Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, p. 157.

²² Robert Worth Frank sets the poem’s representation of poverty and need in the context of actual fourteenth-century food shortages in “The ‘Hungry Gap,’ Crop Failure, and Famine: The Fourteenth-Century Agricultural Crisis and *Piers Plowman*,” *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 4 (1990): pp. 97–104.

²³ On Langland’s representation of the experience of going hungry as a deterrent to idleness, and therefore an enforcer of the social order, see Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity*, pp. 44–5; Kim, “Hunger, Need, and the Politics of Poverty”; Crassons, *Claims of Poverty*, p. 35.

²⁴ Crassons, *Claims of Poverty*, also observes Hunger’s inspiration of excess, but with negative spiritual consequences as “the attempt to relieve Hunger with necessary sustenance turns into an exercise in gluttony” (p. 39). Here I seek to articulate Hunger’s intimations of the excessive quality of mercy, a paradox at the heart of the poem’s discourse on the virtue of measure.

episode on the half-acre illustrates, the sufficiency of that provision depends on human action and, specifically, according to Holy Church, moderation of consumption. Truth, she says, created humankind and ordained the earth to provide “liflode at nede/ In mesurable manere to make yow at ese” (B.1.18–19). Holy Church further discloses that only three things are required to sustain human life, “vesture” to protect against “chele,” “mete at meel,” and “drynke whan þow driest,” and, she is quick to add, human beings should not seek to fulfill these needs “out of reson” (B.1.23–5).²⁵ As Mann has argued, Holy Church not only teaches that consumption should be “mesurable,” but reveals “nede” as a gauge for determining what “mesure” is.²⁶ By instituting need, God has, in fact, provided human beings with a guide to moderation that is “built into” creation itself.²⁷

Piers echoes Holy Church’s instructions when he confronts idlers who refuse to work for the food they consume. “Ye wasten þat men wynnen wiþ trauaille and wiþ tene,” Piers charges. “Ac Trupe shal teche yow his teme to dryue,/ Or ye shul eten barly breed and of þe broke drynke” (B.6.133–5). Piers’s threat reveals that Truth, who has ordered the natural world to provide human “liflode,” will also “teche” those who threaten to disrupt that order. It is indeed a natural representative of Truth’s law that advances his “teme” in this passus. When the knight, an embodiment of positive law, fails to rouse the wasters—they “leet list of þe lawe, and lasse of þe knyght”—Piers summons Hunger to restore order (B.6.168). Arriving with brutal force, Hunger snatches Waster “by the mawe” and wrings his “wombe” until his eyes water (B.6.174–5). Succeeding where the knight had failed, Hunger demonstrates the persuasive power of physical suffering: the *kynde* experience of an empty belly proves more compelling a reason to labor than any law the knight can threaten, a credible truth in its own right.

But in this same passus, the “lawe of kynde” emerges as a powerful corrective to the harsher natural principle of Hunger, who initially represents strict, letter-of-the-law justice; paradoxically, given the figure’s previous severity, Hunger brings forth his own correctives and charity is a

²⁵ On the relationship of moderation and reason (as the eternal law, or divine *ratio*), see Alford, “The Idea of Reason in *Piers Plowman*,” in *Medieval English Studies Presented to George Kane*, ed. Edward D. Kennedy, Ronald A. Waldron, and Joseph S. Wittig. Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1988, pp. 199–215.

²⁶ Mann, “Nature of Need,” pp. 16–17. Holy Church reveals that, insofar as it defines “mesure,” the principle of need also plays a role in controlling the use of “welthe,” or money, and so suggests a natural corrective to the problem of meed: “Need is a way of tying money into the natural order,” Mann writes (p. 18).

²⁷ Mann, “Nature of Need,” p. 13.

lesson that Hunger himself teaches.²⁸ Moreover, although Hunger later elaborates the dangers of letting “Sire Surfet sitten at þi borde” (B.6.264), here Hunger reveals a principle of surplus at the heart of natural law. Moved by pity, Piers attempts to drive Hunger away. He asks for advice, however, in dealing with beggars in the future, for he knows that when they are no longer hungry, they will once more “werche ful ille” (B.6.204). Piers’s question reflects the poem’s complex presentation of the issues of begging and almsgiving. He recognizes all men as his “bloody breþeren,” united in Christ’s sacrifice, and recalls Truth’s command “to louen hem ech one/ And to helpen hem of alle þyng, ay as hem nedeþ” (B.6.207–9). Piers is well versed in the imperatives of charity, but he also knows it is wrong to give to able-bodied beggars who effectively steal alms meant for the “deserving” poor, those who are physically or mentally unable to labor for their sustenance.²⁹ In response to this dilemma, Hunger advises Piers to help all fellow humans regardless of their merit, even though it is appropriate to give able-bodied beggars only the basest variety of sustenance to keep body and soul together, “houndes breed and horse breed” to “hoold vp hir hertes” (B.6.214). As Pearsall explains, Piers “has a responsibility to ensure that no one should starve, though no responsibility to maintain life beyond the meanest level.”³⁰ But while evoking the harsher aspects of natural law, Hunger additionally tasks Piers with an obligation

²⁸ In “Nature of Need,” Mann observes that “the principle of need points in two directions at once, towards justice and towards mercy” (p. 21). For this reason, Langland imagines divine need—which he represents in Christ’s “thirst” for souls in B.18—as the basis of a soteriology (see pp. 26–8).

²⁹ Pearsall, “Poverty and Poor People,” discusses Langland’s attention to the problem of the “chronic poor,” a development that followed crop failure and bouts of plague during the first half of the fourteenth century and led to efforts “to discriminate between the deserving and undeserving poor, and then what to do with the latter” (p. 175). But with special attention to C.9.70–87, Pearsall also points out that Langland is unusually sensitive to the “actual sufferings of poor people,” which he represents with an “unsentimental loving compassion” and “raw truth” (pp. 167, 180). Mann, “Eating and Drinking,” similarly observes Langland’s “spare, matter-of-fact tone” with respect to the representation of poverty: “Langland does not try to win our sympathy for the poor by directly describing them and their pitiful appearance . . . instead he makes poetry out of the things that make up the lives of the poor, and thus re-creates the texture of those lives” (p. 32). On the representation of poverty in *Piers Plowman*, see also, among others: Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity*, pp. 20–72; Clopper, “*Songes of Rechelesnesse*”; Crassons, *The Claims of Poverty*, pp. 21–88; Kim, “Hunger, Need, and the Politics of Poverty”; Middleton, “Acts of Vagrancy,” pp. 208–317; Scase, *Piers Plowman and the New Anticlericalism*; Scott, “*Piers Plowman and the Poor*”; and Geoffrey Shepherd, “Poverty in *Piers Plowman*,” in *Social Relations and Ideals*, ed. T.H. Aston et al. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 169–89.

³⁰ Pearsall, “Poverty and Poor People,” p. 177.

to consider individual cases, rather than treat all beggars equally.³¹ Some are beggars by circumstance, not choice, and in such cases, Hunger urges, Piers ought to treat them with the utmost compassion:

Ac if þow fynde any freke þat Fortune haþ apeired
 Oþer any manere false men, fonde þow swiche to knowe:
 Conforte hem wiþ þi catel for Cristes loue of heuene;
 Loue hem and lene hem—so lawe of kynde wolde:
Alter alterius onera portate. (B.6.218–21a)

In an astonishing turn, Hunger, initially an agent of natural justice, becomes an unexpected advocate of mercy on Piers's half-acre. But going still further, as his speech continues, Hunger acknowledges the difficulty, even perhaps the futility, of distinguishing false beggars from legitimate ones.³² Having first directed Piers to look out for those made needy by bad fortune and false men, Hunger widens the reach of his exhortation to include "alle manere men þat þou myzt asprie/ That nedy ben and nouzty," a category that potentially includes every beggar, regardless of merit. "[N]orisse hem wiþ þi goodes," Hunger urges Piers, "Loue hem and lakke hem noȝt—lat God take þe vengeance" (B.6.222–4).

Langland's wordplay on "noȝt" and "lakke" here highlights what we might call the *excessive* quality of Hunger's addendum. If Piers should find anyone who is "nouzty," that is, in want—having "noȝt," literally no thing—he should refrain from negating their claims to sustenance and, in effect, negating their lives, with his judgment: "lakke hem noȝt," though they be "nouzty."³³ Instead, Hunger commands Piers to tend to their present needs and defer judgment to God. He negates negation by turning "lakke" and "noȝt" to "loue."

³¹ Remarking on Langland's social conservatism, Crassons rightly observes that "[a]s a single categorization, the term [Waster] does away with the conception of workers as unique individuals claiming particular rights or needs in particular circumstances" (*Claims of Poverty*, p. 35). I seek here, however, to draw attention to the shift represented by Hunger's challenge to Piers that he should consider the circumstances of those in need, a shift whose consequences extend to situations of judgment beyond this episode, resurfacing most vividly in the case of Trajan.

³² Scott, *Piers Plowman and the Poor*, takes a position similar to mine in asserting that Langland ultimately eschews the concerns of labor laws to defer judgment to God. "Piers appears to make distinctions between beggars, yet learns, in the course of the passus, that he is not in a position to determine who is deserving or not," Scott writes (p. 109). Crassons also addresses the poem's representation of the challenges of discerning need in *Claims of Poverty*, pp. 21–88.

³³ *MED* s.v. "noughti," adj., primarily connotes moral judgment, meaning immoral or wicked, an association that supports my claim that in this passage Langland transforms the meaning of "naughtiness" from moral failure to simple neediness.

Moreover, in suspending judgment, Hunger replaces the settling of accounts with an imperative to meet “lakke” with a magnanimity that resembles God’s own grace, as he concludes: “And if þow wilt be *gracious* to God, do as þe Gospel techēþ, / And bilowe þee amonges lowe men—so shaltow lacche *grace*” (B.6.226–7, my emphasis). The primary meaning of “gracious” is simply “pleasing” (MED 5a), but through repetition in these lines Hunger coordinates human graciousness, the capacity to please God, with the capaciousness of divine grace itself. In doing so, he reveals a circularity in the condition of grace, suggesting that the possibility of pleasing God (being “gracious”) results from and *looks like* God’s own grace. Human beings are “gracious to God” when they defer judgment to him, in effect, yielding to his greater authority, and when “for Cristes loue of heuene” they show charity to those in need (B.6.220). In both cases, graciousness—behavior that pleases God—is characterized as personal forbearance, an open-handed gesture. Paradoxically, by giving, and by *giving up*, human beings “lacche”—catch, seize, capture—grace, God’s own gift (B.6.227). By describing the acquisition of grace in terms of exchange (being gracious wins grace), Hunger preserves the form of justice as reciprocity even while he advocates the necessarily unbalanced terms of grace, the gift freely given, in excess of merit.

The phrase “lawe of kynde” again bridges the discourses of lack and excess when the figure Need appeals to it in the poem’s final passus. Overtaking Will as it “neghed neiz þe noon,” Need seems to be another manifestation of Hunger, as Will complains “I ne wiste wher to ete ne at what place” (B.20.3–4).³⁴ The two figures are indeed intimately related, for, as we have seen, Hunger appeals to the principle of need when he advises Piers to care for “alle manere men . . . [t]hat *nedy* ben and nouȝty” (B.6.222–3, my emphasis). Hunger claims that the “lawe of kynde” warrants charity, or mutual burden bearing: “Loue hem and lene hem—so lawe of kynde wolde: / *Alter alterius onera portate*” (B.6.221–a).³⁵ Need also cites the “lawe of kynde,” and again the principle justifies a transgression, or, we might say, a liberalization of strict justice. But in a significant departure from Hunger’s use of the term, in Need’s citation, the “law of

³⁴ In “Hunger, Need, and the Politics of Poverty,” Kim also pairs the Hunger and Need episodes, highlighting how these two figures, along with Patience, “sustain a continuous discussion . . . concerning poor people’s place in political society” (p. 151). Unlike Patience, who idealizes poverty and advocates a withdrawal from “worldly society,” Hunger and Need give visibility to the condition of poverty in such a way that “needy people register in the collective consciousness of public political discourse” (p. 151).

³⁵ Scott, *Piers Plowman and the Poor*, interprets the line from Galatians 6: 2 as the “scriptural theme” of passus B.6–7 and the basis for her claim that Langland “stress[es] material and present relief of the poor as a *sine qua non* of salvation” (pp. 96, 72).

kynde" warrants *taking* rather than giving. Need advises Will that it is no sin to take what he needs so long as he abides by the *Spiritus Temperancie*, for "nede ne haþ no lawe, ne neuere shal falle in dette" with respect to the three necessities of "mete," clothing, and drink (B.20.10–12, 16, 19). Although the principle of need demands attention to measure—a man should "nome na moore þan nede þee tauzte" (B.20.9)—Need's claim to be outside the law and beyond the keeping of accounts (he never falls into "dette") aligns him with the discourses of mercy and grace that Hunger eventually promotes in the earlier passus. As in the natural law tradition, where the law of nature is understood to exist prior to and therefore to override positive laws that violate its principles, Need's "lawe of kynde" references the prior claims of every person to those things required to sustain his or her own life. As Need puts it, if a man "list for to lape," that is, if he was thirsty, he would be justified in drinking "at ech a dych, er he deide for þurste" (B.20.18–19).

A critical debate surrounds Need's significance and the authority of his claims. Robert Frank describes Need as a warning against the spiritual hazards of being needy.³⁶ Pamela Gradon and Wendy Scase connect Need to antifraternal polemic, both concluding that his arguments represent Langland's view of the speciousness of mendicant claims to practice voluntary poverty.³⁷ Robert Adams equates Need with the "noonday demon" of Psalm 90: 6 and Hugh White concurs, suggesting that "it seems very likely that Nede here is an evil tempter, the forerunner of Antichrist."³⁸ But recent criticism casts Need in a more positive light. Richard Firth Green contextualizes Need's claim that "nede ne hath no lawe" within contemporary legal practice, demonstrating that Langland's audiences would have recognized it as a version of the plea of necessity, a legal maxim recorded in Bracton and *Britton* though never officially codified.³⁹ Jill Mann considers the figure as an expression of the poem's "need ethos."⁴⁰

³⁶ See Frank, *Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation: An Interpretation of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 114.

³⁷ Gradon, "Langland and the Ideology of Dissent," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 66 (1980): p. 203; and Scase, *Piers Plowman and the New Anticlericalism*, pp. 65–8. Clopper, similarly, describes Need as a friar, but does not see the figure as malevolent. See "*Songes of Rechelesnesse*," pp. 93–7.

³⁸ Adams, "The Nature of Need in *Piers Plowman* XX," *Traditio* 34 (1978): pp. 273–301; White, *Nature and Salvation*, p. 90.

³⁹ Green, "'Nede ne hath no lawe': The Plea of Necessity in Medieval Literature and Law," in *Living Dangerously: On the Margins in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and Anna Grotans (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), pp. 9–30.

⁴⁰ Mann, "Nature of Need," p. 24. Mann's phrase responds to Aers's elaboration of the poem's "work ethos," a term Aers uses to describe Langland's sympathies in the first part of

While I agree with Mann that need is one of the fundamental categories of natural experience that structures the moral, ethical, and soteriological vision of *Piers Plowman*, and that Need should not be understood as demonic or inherently immoral, I do suggest that this passage is designed to unsettle readers. As Zeeman indicates, Need is “problematic precisely because he is the corruption of something Langland values.”⁴¹ More specifically, Will’s encounter with Need draws attention to the problem of relying on need as a principle of personal and social amelioration. It is not only, as Aranye Fradenburg observes, that need slides too easily into “excess, into a vile enjoyment, into crime.”⁴² The whole scenario that Need describes envisions the utter failure of charity, a failure of the system that Need’s counterpart Hunger promotes as the correct moral and ethical response to need in B.6. A man who lacks food might take it on the principle of need “whan men hym werneþ,” that is, when others refuse him because “he no moneye weldeþ,” nor will any man serve as his “boruþ” or “wed,” a sure sign of social disintegration (B.20.12–13). The world Need describes in order to justify theft is already a world in which Antichrist reigns because it is a world devoid of charity. While it might be true that a man “synneþ noȝt” if need compels him to save his own life by stealing food, drink, and clothing, this is no basis for society. The “lawe of kynde” as defined by Need is insufficient because it gives responsibility for action to the one in need rather than those who observe the condition of need and the suffering it causes. In the remainder of this chapter, I will examine the other valence of the “lawe of kynde” as defined by Hunger as a law of mercy and of love.

THE GOLDEN RULE

When Hunger appeals to “Cristes loue” as the motive for charity—and thus evokes both the love exhibited by Christ as well as his followers’ love for him—Langland participates in a tradition that goes back to Gratian’s *Decretum* in attributing natural law simultaneously to instinct, as represented by its advocate, the allegorical figure Hunger, and to scriptural mandate, as represented by Hunger’s citation of Galatians 6: 2: “*Alter alterius*

the poem with the interests of employers in the labor conflicts of the later fourteenth century (*Community, Gender, and Individual Identity*, p. 38).

⁴¹ Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, p. 279.

⁴² Fradenburg, “Needful Things,” in *Medieval Crime and Social Control*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 54.

onera portate" [Bear ye one another's burdens] (B.6.221a). As we have seen, Gratian's definition of natural law likewise embraces biblical imperative and inner teaching. The Mosaic code and the Gospels both command that every person should do unto others what he wishes done to himself ("quod sibi uult fieri") and prohibit him to do unto others what he does not wish done to himself ("quod sibi nolit fieri").⁴³ Although Gratian anchors natural law in both testaments, his paraphrase of the golden rule of Matthew 7: 12 appeals to individual feeling, the desire of the will, as the verbs "uult" (from *velle*) and "nolit" (from *nolle*) indicate above.

Moreover, for Gratian, as I think for Langland, the specific context of Matthew 7: 12 matters. Matthew's lesson is not a general truth but specifically attributed to Christ's own teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (and in the corresponding Sermon on the Plain of Luke 6: 20–49).⁴⁴ As such, the natural law as golden rule becomes metonymically linked to the speaking Christ, the incarnate divinity whose presence, as the sermon insists, does not abolish the Old Law, but fulfills it (Matt 5: 17), a continuity that Gratian's definition also asserts.⁴⁵ As Christ the teacher embodies natural law, so also the context of the golden rule in the Sermon on the Mount points toward the means by which Christ reconciles the two laws of justice and mercy in the sermon's injunction to love not only one's neighbor, but one's enemies, too. In place of the equivalency of the *lex talionis*, which demands an eye for an eye, Christ now teaches a different measure, a different kind of reciprocity: turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, give without expectation of return (Matt 5: 38–44). In identifying natural law with Christ's golden rule, Gratian offers an ethical code that transcends positive law and reimagines the reciprocal structure of justice.

Langland himself cites Matthew 7: 12 in two separate instances, both concerning the practice of law and mercy. These are strong arguments in favor of his knowledge of the principles of natural law and Gratian's ascription of its textual basis to Matthew's gospel. In the B-text the line occurs within Truth's Pardon during a digression on the duties of "legistres and lawieres" (B.7.59). These "men of lawe" lose their portion of the pardon when they plead "for mede" (B.7.39). Instead they ought to defend the poor and innocent *pro bono*—"for Oure Lordes loue lawe for hym shewep" (B.7.49). Matthew's golden rule follows these lines, witnessing the principle that keepers of laws should follow: "Quodcumque uultis ut faciant

⁴³ *Corpus iuris canonici*, I: 1.

⁴⁴ On the importance of context to interpreting specific formulations of the golden rule, see Wattles, *Golden Rule*, pp. 3–12. Wattles offers close readings of the rule in the context of both Matthew's and Luke's accounts, pp. 52–76.

⁴⁵ Wattles, *Golden Rule*, p. 56, likewise observes this point, suggesting that the golden rule has a special role to play in Christ's fulfillment of the law.

vobis homines, facite eis" (B.7.59a). Drawing an extraordinary analogy between physical creation and natural reason, Langland inserts the "wit" of trained lawyers within the traditional series of the four elements that God "made to this foold in commune" (B.7.52–3). Water, wind, wit, and fire are "Trupes tresores" and, as such, should never be bought and sold, an offense that amounts to simony, as the C-text states explicitly: "For hit is symonye to sulle that sent is of grace—/ . . . Thise foure sholde be fre to alle folk that hit nedede" (C.9.55, 57). Presented as a basic need tantamount to the natural substances that God created to sustain life, fair treatment under the law, the rightful product of lawyerly wit, becomes a good common to all and, as such, charity demands its distribution without regard to one's ability to "bugge" it (B.7.52). As Langland's citation of the biblical golden rule in the B-text makes clear, those who possess such "tresores" have an obligation to share them, making available to others that which they would want for themselves were they the ones in need.⁴⁶ In this case, the golden rule does not suspend positive law but guarantees its honest fulfillment. In urging lawyers to work *pro bono*, the pardon does effect an imbalance in terms of earthly payment, suggesting that to act as advocate for those in need promises future payment, the "mede" of "Oure Lordes loue" (B.7.49).

Langland cites Matthew 7: 12 a second time in another passage that asks its readers to develop a sense of empathy, to consider what it might be like to inhabit another person's circumstances. In answer to the narrator's disbelief in the existence of Charity, Liberum Arbitrium describes it as a "childische thyng" (C.16.296). Indeed, in Liberum Arbitrium's description, Charity is an almost otherworldly spirit, not yet too entangled in the expectations of secular adult life, naïve, trusting, and extraordinarily literal-minded. "And when a man swereth for soth, for sooth he hit troweth," Liberum Arbitrium avows (C.16.303). It is this absolute commitment to the veracity of language and appearances that gives Charity its radically sympathetic capacity, a power something like the Chaucerian narrator's ability to penetrate the thoughts of his fellow travelers and uncritically represent their worldviews. Charity appropriates the emotional states of those he encounters: he is "glad with alle glade, as gurlles that lawhen alle,/ And sory when he seth men sory—as thow seest childerne/ Lawhe þer men lawheth and lour þer opere louren" (C.16.300–2). These lines most suitably set up Langland's second citation of Matthew 7: 12, a biblical call to charity that bases its claims on a principle of common desire. Childlike Charity represents the essential simplicity of

⁴⁶ I discuss Langland's parallel treatment of physical and spiritual charity in Chapter 5.

caring for others, implying that compassion is an instinctive capacity that human beings lose touch with only as they age and become world weary.

In each of these passages, behavior is directed not by any codified law but by native sympathy, a feeling turned to action that is underwritten, as Hunger proclaims, by “Cristes loue of hevene” (B.6.220). Moreover, Gratian’s association of the natural law with the golden rule establishes a surprising relationship between the terms justice and mercy that Langland exploits in shaping his notion of the “lawe of kynde” as an imperative to charity. Paul Ricoeur has written that Christ’s formulation of the golden rule in the Sermon on the Mount transforms the “logic of equivalence that governs everyday morality” into a “logic of superabundance” that operates according to an “economy of the gift” rather than one of exchange or equity in the strict sense.⁴⁷ For Ricoeur, it is the “detour of the golden rule”—its illusion of reciprocity—that enables Christ to maintain the equivalence that the Old Law demands even as he urges practices that lack measure.⁴⁸ “The commandment to love according to this interpretation, brings about a *conversion* of the golden rule from its penchant toward self-interest to a welcoming attitude toward the other,” Ricoeur writes.⁴⁹

My account differs somewhat from Ricoeur’s in that he sees the “detour” as a kind of delay or possible misdirection—corrected by the commandment to love—while I see this “detour” as the very structure by which law becomes love. The golden rule appropriates the reciprocal structure of strict justice as a means to reimagine how reciprocity works. The hallmark of justice is equilibrium, a balanced equation: you get what you give. The golden rule, however, appropriates the structure of reciprocity through a skewed temporality: give what you would wish to get if you were the one in need. The suspension of the time of judgment, as indicated by the subjunctive mood of Matthew’s “ut faciant,” crucially distinguishes the rigid dictates of justice from the open-endedness of mercy. As a hypothetical, the golden rule introduces a space of possibility, a thought of need that may be as yet unrealized in actuality and that demands an imaginative, flexible response to the condition of the other. As such, the golden rule is based on and *breaks open* the model of justice as reciprocity. Rather than giving back to another what he or she has *already* given you (or, to put it another way, to exact retribution for what they

⁴⁷ Ricoeur, “Ethical and Theological Considerations on the Golden Rule,” in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace and trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 300.

⁴⁸ Ricoeur, “Ethical and Theological Considerations on the Golden Rule,” p. 301.

⁴⁹ Ricoeur, “Ethical and Theological Considerations on the Golden Rule,” p. 300.

have taken), the golden rule reimagines reciprocity as something more like reflexivity, a mirroring action such as that exemplified by the “childische thyng” Charity (C.16.296). That is to say, the rule of equivalency remains in place, but now, rather than settling up accounts, Christ directs his followers to take the place of the other.

I have been arguing that Langland develops the “lawe of kynde” in response to the medieval concept of natural law as an ethical system that exists prior to positive, codified law. The enduring potency of natural law as such lies in its accessibility to all, regardless of belief or *clergie*. Even more important than its ready availability, however, is its *felt* presence as a personal, interior stirring to virtue, particularly defined as care for one’s neighbor and kin, as we witnessed in Piers’s compassionate action on the half-acre. The “lawe of kynde”—written in the human heart, felt in the gut, authorized by God’s own appearance as Kynde and *in kynde* as Christ—demands that every person share in the bearing of burdens. Showing Piers the way to forestall his own law of retribution, Hunger teaches a law of mercy that reverberates throughout the poem. As natural law remains outside precedent, beyond the letter of positive, codified law, so too the “lawe of kynde” is never set forth plainly in a documentary manner or expounded by traditional figures of authority in *Piers Plowman*. Rather its precepts are articulated by figures closely associated with native qualities or experiences, chiefly Hunger, Need, and, in the C-text, Liberum Arbitrium, whom Masha Raskolnikov has described as Will’s “most perfect interlocutor,” the “other self” with whom he shares a name, in other words, a supremely *kynde* figure.⁵⁰

In the second half of this chapter, I turn to Trajan, another figure of native authority, whose natural virtue plays an important—though I will argue not decisive—role in his salvation. A figure of popular legend, the pagan emperor gained fame as an exceptional case before the law.⁵¹ As such, Trajan offers an example parallel to that of Hunger: both figures reveal the power of the “law of kynde” to challenge precedents and demand a reassessment of what constitutes justice. Both figures, as we shall see, provoke a personal and affective reaction, turning judges into

⁵⁰ Raskolnikov, “Promising the Female, Delivering the Male,” p. 95. I discuss Liberum Arbitrium’s pointed challenge to the “lawe of kynde” in Chapter 5.

⁵¹ On the popular versions of the legend of Trajan, see Wittig, “Inward Journey,” pp. 249–63, who argues that although Langland “gives credit to Gregory’s instrumentality,” he largely adapts the legend to emphasize Trajan’s good works and it therefore functions as a “striking corrective” to Will’s scorn for works at the end of the previous passus (pp. 254–5, 259). See also Gordon Whatley’s more expansive survey, “The Uses of Hagiography: The Legend of Pope Gregory and the Emperor Trajan in the Middle Ages,” *Viator* 15 (1984): pp. 25–63.

intercessors. Here a caveat is necessary: the “lawe of kynde” does not appear precisely as such in Trajan’s speech; he extols instead a “lawe of loue,” a principle that similarly tempers justice with mercy, producing a paradoxical law *of* mercy, and so essentially functions as a synonym and extension of the earlier formulation. Trajan’s argument that law is meaningless without love (“Lawe wipouten loue . . . ley þer a bene,” B.11.170) in fact recalls the advice of Will’s first interlocutor. In the same passage in which she identifies the inner dwelling of Truth and impugns “chastite wipouten charite,” Holy Church proclaims the basis of judgment under such a “lawe of loue”: “*‘Date, et dabitur vobis—for I deele yow alle.’/ And þat ys þe lok of loue þat leteþ out my grace*” (B.1.188, 201–2, citing Luke 6: 38). Like the golden rule of Matthew 7: 12, the line from Luke’s corresponding Sermon on the Plain seems to call for balance in accord with Old Testament principles of justice—“Give, and it will be given unto you”—but its structure as a simple *quid pro quo* transaction is immediately revealed to be misleading. Mann has identified these lines and their biblical contexts as the nexus of Langland’s early meditation on the relationship of justice and mercy, the very moment, in fact, in which Holy Church pivots from “talking about Truth to talking about Love.”⁵² As Hunger advised Piers, the principle of need—manifest in the suffering of his “breþeren” on the half-acre—authorizes action that might otherwise violate the demands of strict justice. These lines, moreover, stand at the heart of a great paradox in Holy Church’s speech, for elsewhere the advocate of measure, Holy Church here cites Christ’s command to give *beyond* measure, or at least without regard to it. For where God is the “dealer,” as Holy Church adds, recompense is never in balance with what is given, for God gives all. In its biblical context, following Christ’s analogy of the lilies of the field, the command to charitable giving embodies a particular hopefulness: those who give without regard for measure can trust that erring on the side of charity does not “break” God’s system of justice, for on Judgment Day God, who “deals” for all, will balance the books, so to speak. The more out of measure we love, Holy Church promises, the readier the lock turns “that leteþ out . . . grace” (B.1.202).

These principles establish a basis for a new reading of Trajan’s salvation and the exhortations to love and mercy that surround the passage. In a strict sense, mercy may seem to interfere with justice, but according to God’s system of accounts, the logic of justice as a balanced equation can be fulfilled only through acts of unmeasured love. Holy Church’s notion of a “lok of loue” evokes a complex series of images culminating in a paradox

⁵² Mann, “Nature of Need,” p. 19.

equal to Trajan's own formulation of a "lawe of loue." In Holy Church's speech, the "lok" is the "*Date*" text from Luke, or more specifically, the activity of charity it commands. The immediate sense of the "lok" evokes the treasure chest of Holy Church's foregoing praise of Truth as the "tresor þe trieste on erþe," that which is locked up within the human heart (B.1.137). Rather than a strongbox restricting the circulation of grace, however, the "lok of loue" would seem to be the key to its release. Recalling the lover's knot of medieval romance, the love-lock is the bond of love that demands giving ("*Date*"), suggesting with Boethian undertones that love binds as surely as any legal statute. Moreover, as a lover's knot symbolizes mutuality of obligation, so, too, Trajan's story is not an example of how to *earn* salvation, but draws attention to the relationship between those who judge and those who will be judged. Trajan, in life a law-giver renowned for his "domes," ideally figures the paradox of Christ's command "*Eadem mensura*" (Matt. 7: 2), which Trajan cites at B.11.226a: all those who judge will one day themselves face judgment. Together Trajan and Gregory represent the reciprocal and unfinished nature of judgment. Langland highlights Gregory's role because the merciful pope, whose papal office grants him the keys "to bynden and to vnbynden" (B.Prol.101), demonstrates the loosening power of love *beyond* his institutional capacity: Gregory responds to Trajan in an immediate and personal way to which all Christians might aspire.

TRAJAN'S SALVATION AND THE EQUITABLE JURISDICTION

Before I proceed to examine more closely the crucial reciprocity between Trajan and Gregory, the "lok of loue" that binds them, I want to suggest some ways in which Trajan's "lawe of loue" echoes specific developments in late medieval legal theory and practice. Trajan's exceptional case has attracted much commentary on related issues of eschatological justice, the problem of the virtuous pagan, and theological debates on faith and works, serving for some as witness to Langland's semi-Pelagianism.⁵³

⁵³ See, for example, Coleman, *Piers Plowman and the Moderni*, who reads the Trajan episode as a vernacular exploration of Ockhamist views on God's absolute freedom of will but stops short of claiming that Langland advocates these views, pp. 108–46; Gradon, "*Trajanus Redivivus*: Another Look at Trajan in *Piers Plowman*," in *Middle English Studies Presented to Norman Davis*, ed. Douglas Gray and E.G. Stanley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), pp. 93–114, who describes Langland's presentation of the Trajan's legend as "a clearly Pelagian position" (p. 101); and Robert Adams, "Langland's Theology," in *A Companion to "Piers Plowman"*, ed. John Alford (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press,

A paragon of natural, though non-Christian, virtue, Trajan exemplifies the claims of natural law, a truth whose indwelling presence is, as we have seen, both prior to positive law and positioned to correct it. My particular interest in Trajan's testimony relates to these concerns with salvation but turns more directly to the influence of natural law on codified, institutional forms of law as they appear in *Piers Plowman*. Specifically, I argue that in the Trajan passage and in several linked episodes we may discern Langland's engagement with forms of royal discretionary judgment, by which I refer to a range of petitionary practices that served to mitigate the strictures and shortcomings of common law in the late fourteenth century. In offering examples of discretionary justice that override or supplement established precedent, these linked passages evoke the nascent idea of an equitable jurisdiction, a theory of legal remedy that developed in Chancery's expanding role as a court of royal prerogative. The second half of the fourteenth century, and in particular the decades between 1370 and 1390, was a crucial period in the development of the legal principles that would produce a fully theorized system of equity by the sixteenth century.⁵⁴ In his observation of the proceedings at Westminster, whether as a clerk or simply an engaged spectator, Langland witnessed a period of legal transition and innovation. Contemporary accounts record widespread dissatisfaction with the operation of common law during the late fourteenth century, and the royal administration was in the process of responding to these critiques even as Langland wrote and revised his poem.⁵⁵ While the

1988), who agrees that Langland emphasizes works, and calls his position "semi-Pelagian" (p. 96). Frank Grady and Derek Pearsall each take a broader view of the question of Trajan's salvation. Grady, "*Piers Plowman*, *St. Erkenwald*, and the Rule of Exceptional Salvations," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 6 (1992): pp. 63–88, examines Trajan within the context of history, arguing that Langland presents Trajan as a historical figure rather than the embodiment of a theological position, and Pearsall, "The Idea of Universal Salvation in *Piers Plowman* B and C," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 39: 2 (2009): pp. 206–61, examines Trajan within the context of the poem's "unique unfolding drama," as one answer among many posed in the "course of Langland's salvation thinking through the poem." I discuss the issues of exceptional and universal salvation in Chapter 5.

⁵⁴ See Robert C. Palmer, *English Law in the Age of the Black Death 1348–1381: A Transformation of Governance and Law* (Chapel Hill, NC and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), pp. 109–10, 130–2, and Anthony Musson and W.-M. Ormrod, *The Evolution of English Justice: Law, Politics and Society in the Fourteenth Century* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999), p. 25. Not all reactions to the emerging equitable jurisdiction were favorable. See petitions against the council's expanding jurisdiction and autonomy in Bertie Wilkinson, *Constitutional History of Medieval England 1216–1399*, 3 vols (London: Longmans, 1958), pp. 127–30, 147–50. For a view that considers how medieval equity evolved into its mature form, see the introduction to W.H. Bryson, ed., *Cases Concerning Equity and the Courts of Equity 1550–1660*, vol. 1 (London: Selden Society, 2001), pp. xviii–xxxiii.

⁵⁵ A primary piece of evidence is a writ of 1349 that allows petitioners to submit their pleas directly to the Chancellor and Keeper of the Privy Seal, suggesting that the king was

major theorists of equity postdate Langland's lifetime—figures such as Pecock, Fortescue, and Christopher St. German—the “lawe of kynde” strongly evokes the contemporary development of a legal process that seeks to correct the formalism of positive law. Before turning to Trajan, it will be helpful to begin with other critical views of equity's influence in the poem to ascertain exactly what the principle of equity might have meant to Langland.

William Birnes first explored the influence of equity law in *Piers Plowman* in an essay tracing the poem's use of legal metaphor.⁵⁶ As Birnes observes, Langland exploits “parallels between the contrast of the Old and New Laws of the Scriptures and the English Common and Chancery Laws.” Just as the New Law “eas[ed] the inflexibility of the Old Law,” Birnes writes,

the coming of equity law eased the plight of many subjects by making the existing law flexible enough to cover their particular cases. Both the New Law and equitable jurisdiction were outgrowths of the existing law . . . Both legal concepts stressed the conditions of the individual case, and the spirit of the law rather than the letter of the law was at the basis of the decision.⁵⁷

Like Birnes, I wish to draw out Langland's interest in “the individual case,” the exception that exposes the inadequacy of comprehensive legislation. Birnes's argument concerns the poem's *allegorical* justification of the shift from the Old to the New Law in the debates between the Four Daughters of God and between Christ and the Devil in B.18, but my focus is a specific and historical “individual case.” Through Trajan we can explore the broader significance of the concept of equity as a law of mercy that, like the New Law and the “lawe of kynde,” provides a basis for correcting the shortcomings of the inflexible and inevitably corruptible positive law. Put another way, Birnes emphasizes eschatology—he reads in one direction, posing Langland's interest in Chancery law as an analogy for divine mercy—but I wish to prioritize Langland's secular interests, that is, how the law of love introduced by Christ in the New Testament provides a basis and even an obligation to reform contemporary legal practice, as Trajan's command to moderate law with love makes clear: “Wel ouzte ye lordes þat lawes kepe þis lesson to haue in mynde” (B.11.157). If the New Testament is equitable in eschatological matters,

overwhelmed by appeals to his special grace. See Wilkinson, *Constitutional History*, p. 147. On the impact of fourteenth-century economic and social crises on the development of equity, see Palmer, *English Law*, pp. 104–32, and Musson and Ormrod, *Evolution of English Justice*, especially pp. 75–101.

⁵⁶ Birnes, “Christ as Advocate,” p. 71.

⁵⁷ Birnes, “Christ as Advocate,” p. 78.

in the sense that it demands merciful reassessment of the strict justice that characterizes Old Testament law, it also bears implications for the practices of contemporary law-givers who are responsible for *secular* justice. The parallel between the two sets of laws that Birnes observes is most powerful when we allow Langland's analogy to work in both directions, as the poem's handling of spiritual and secular matters so often demands. I want to suggest that Langland's elaboration of a theory of equity in the context of exceptional salvations like Trajan simultaneously highlights the obligations of contemporary law-givers and judges of all types, possibly with allusion to contemporary equity practices, and leads back once more to eschatology. For, as we shall see, Trajan and others like him challenge even the capaciousness of the New Law. The poem's exploration of God's mercy is reciprocally informed by practices of royal discretionary judgment. However limited his authority might be, Trajan's speech challenges his audience to imagine that God will dispense special or supplemental grace in cases like his, just as an equitable king might show mercy to his subjects through Chancery and other prerogative channels.

While Birnes had focused almost exclusively on legal language in the debates between the Four Daughters of God and between Christ and the devil in B.18, more recent inquiries into Langland's representations of legal process have focused on episodes that appear to be set in contemporary courts. Anna Baldwin, for example, sets the trial of Meed in the king's prerogative courts, linking the exercise of royal discretionary judgment to Langland's representation of absolutism: "When a king judged through prerogative courts, he acted as an absolute monarch."⁵⁸ For Langland, Baldwin argues, such absolutism was essential to fair rule. The king's exercise of authority "according to the principles of equity," Baldwin writes, neutralizes the corruptive power of Meed.⁵⁹ In a study of Peace's petition against Wrong in B.4, Kathleen Kennedy also locates the episode in a prerogative court, proposing that the scene in fact represents the "mythical origin" of Chancery as distinct from other types of courts in which petitions might be heard.⁶⁰ Compared to Birnes and Baldwin, however, who suggest that Langland celebrates the king's exercise of discretionary power to strengthen the law, Kennedy offers a more pessimistic view of the effects of discretionary courts, focusing instead on the corruptive power of maintenance-at-law and outright bribery as embodied by Meed and her entourage. Contrary to all three views, Matthew

⁵⁸ Baldwin, *Theme of Government*, p. 23.

⁵⁹ Baldwin, *Theme of Government*, p. 23.

⁶⁰ Kathleen E. Kennedy, "Retaining a Court of Chancery in *Piers Plowman*," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 17 (2003): p. 173.

Giancarlo builds a strong case *against* the association of Meed's trial with a prerogative court, such as Chancery or the King's Council, and instead places it in the context of a full session of Parliament. "Only in a parliamentary setting," Giancarlo writes, "do all of the issues raised by Meed, and about her, make sense."⁶¹

These disagreements about the location of this episode reflect the fluidity of the petitionary system in the second half of the fourteenth century as Chancery was in the process of becoming a distinct administrative and legal office. The notion of an equitable jurisdiction developed out of the growth of the royal administration during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. During this period the king's council, or *curia regis*, expanded into three major branches which served as courts to administer royal justice and protect the king's rights and interests: the Exchequer, the Court of the King's Bench, and the Court of Common Pleas.⁶² Each of these common law tribunals had its own jurisdiction, but from the fourteenth century the Chancery developed as a secretarial body that oversaw the production of original writs, the documents that initiated action in the courts. In its administrative capacity, the Chancery issued writs of two types, *de cursu* and *de gratia*. Writs *de cursu* were formulae for judicial action that adhered to ordinary categories and procedures established by the common law. Writs *de gratia*, by contrast, were framed and issued at the king's discretion, primarily to intervene in a common law case that concerned the king's own interests. As head of Chancery, the chancellor thus served as mediator of the king's grace, and this important role expanded during the second half of the fourteenth century when, in response to a host of social and political pressures, the king's council continued to develop as an autonomous judicial body.⁶³ The Chancery, once only an administrative office, took on an additional function as a court of royal prerogative, that is, of the king's own justice outside the established precedents and procedures of the common law. Unlike the common law courts, where action was set in motion by writs, those seeking redress in the prerogative courts could address petitions directly to the king and his council, and by the second half of the fourteenth century petitions were addressed to the chancellor directly, suggesting the

⁶¹ Matthew Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 190.

⁶² See Musson and Ormrod, *Evolution of English Justice*, pp. 12–25, and John Hamilton Baker, *An Introduction to English Legal History* (London: Butterworths, 1971), pp. 112–34.

⁶³ On the development of writs *de gratia*, see Musson and Ormrod, *Evolution of English Justice*, p. 24, and Wilkinson, *Constitutional History of Medieval England*, pp. 123–5. Palmer discusses the expansion of the chancellor's role as a judge in *English Law in the Age of the Black Death*, pp. 107–10.

growing autonomy of that office.⁶⁴ Gradually the chancellor became the king's proxy in this "court of conscience," so called because the Chancery court was unconstrained by the standardized, formal procedures of common law; instead, Chancery justice considered the circumstances of individual cases and made judgments based on principles of conscience.⁶⁵

As the head of the law, the English monarch had long wielded the power of discretionary judgment and petitions for royal grace took many forms including but not limited to petitions addressed directly to the king. Parliament, too, had from its beginnings functioned as a judicial court of last resort, but from the reign of Edward I it was opened up to receive private petitions of all sorts, producing, by the fourteenth century, a complex petitionary system with numerous channels through which both individuals and groups could seek remedy and redress.⁶⁶ In this period of legal innovation, it is hardly surprising that Langland's representation of royal prerogative action would be laden both with ambiguity as to its precise location and ambivalence about the nature of its effects.

In the most recent assessment of Chancery law in *Piers Plowman*, Conrad van Dijk refutes previous associations of Langlandian equity with Chancery on precisely the grounds that the practice would have been only in its nascent stages. He offers a convincing case for the mobility of the term "equite" in late fourteenth-century usage, arguing that the single instance of the word in *Piers Plowman* follows the jurist Ulpian's definition of equity as strict, impartial justice characterized by "consistency and fairness" rather than the Aristotelian alternative (also current in this period via Aquinas) that defined equity as a corrective supplement to positive law.⁶⁷ "In Langland," van Dijk writes, "equity . . . is more about applying law equally to every case than about supplying, adjusting, modifying, or interpreting the law."⁶⁸ In other words, van Dijk does not deny that "equite" *might* appear during this period as a principle of merciful redress but argues that in Langland, Gower, and many other

⁶⁴ See Timothy S. Haskett, "The Medieval English Court of Chancery," *Law and History Review* 14 (1996): pp. 250–1, and Baker, *English Legal History*, p. 117.

⁶⁵ On the notion that Chancery was a "court of conscience," see Baker, *English Legal History*, pp. 118–19. See Doe, *Fundamental Authority*, for a broad consideration of the role that conscience was thought to play in developing and administering the common law, pp. 132–54.

⁶⁶ See Gwilym Dodd, *Justice and Grace: Private Petitioning and the English Parliament in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), especially pp. 89–125, which sets the emergence of an equitable jurisdiction within the context of other types of petitionary practices.

⁶⁷ Conrad van Dijk, "Giving Each His Due: Langland, Gower, and the Question of Equity," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 108 (2009): p. 321.

⁶⁸ van Dijk, "Giving Each His Due," p. 322.

fourteenth-century witnesses, it did not yet designate anything like Chancery law or New Testament mercy. But van Dijk's study, at least with regard to *Piers Plowman*, is too narrow, for it overlooks significant affinities between the developing theories of equity law and Langland's ideal of justice.

The centerpiece of van Dijk's case is the appearance of the term "equite" near the conclusion of the B-text when Grace endows the church with the four cardinal virtues, including the *Spiritus Iusticie*, described as follows:

Spiritus Iusticie spareþ noȝt to spille hem þat ben gilty,
 And for to correcte þe kyng if he kyng falle in any kynnes gilte.
 For counteþ he no kynges wraþe whan he in court sitteþ
 To demen as a domesman; adrad was he neuere
 Neiper of duc ne of deef, þat he ne dide þe lawe.
 For present or for preiere or any prynces lettres,
 He dide *equyte* to alle eueneforþ his power.

(B.19.305–11, my emphasis at line 311)

As van Dijk rightly concludes, the occurrence of "equyte" in these lines does not seem to refer to the principle of equitable jurisdiction developing in Chancery during this period, or any particularly merciful action at all, but rather conveys its primary denotation of fairness and impartiality.⁶⁹ The *Spiritus Iusticie* embodies the pure execution of justice, a process of evaluation that has no regard for status nor fears the repercussions of judgment, nor can be swayed by the enticements of wealth, an impartiality notably missing from the scene of Meed's corruptive influence in the trial of B.2–4.

However, I argue that another view of equity appears if we examine equitable judgments in the poem more broadly, beyond occurrences of the word itself. I suggest that the *concept* of equity as a supplemental and improvisational jurisprudence that rights wrongs according to the generous spirit rather than the blunt letter of the law may have preexisted its connection to the Middle English word "equite." In fact, the Langlandian concept of equitable judgment seems to be tied instead to the term "leaute," a word that highlights relationships of reciprocity and, as P.M. Kean first revealed, is often in *Piers Plowman* found alliteratively linked with "loue" as a correction or supplement to "lawe."⁷⁰ Looking at the spirit of equity in the poem beyond uses of the word itself leads us to

⁶⁹ MED, s.v. "equite," n., 1.a. "Equite" also appears in the poem at B.17.310/C.19.290 and, in an instance unique to C, at C.17.240.

⁷⁰ Kean, "Love, Law, and Leute in *Piers Plowman*," *Review of English Studies* 15 (1964): pp. 241–61. In a companion essay, Kean equates the triad law, "leaute," and love with Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest, respectively. These together constitute "a formula for the Good

reevaluate the “present,” “preiere,” and “prynces lettres” spurned by the *Spiritus Iusticie* in its perfect execution of justice. Intercessory letters, in particular, figure the complex textuality of equity law. On the one hand, like other forms of royal discretionary judgment, the equitable jurisdiction operates beyond the codified bounds of the law. To the extent that it issues a *personal* intervention not determined by precedent, looking to the spirit rather than to the letter, the equitable jurisdiction is an extratextual mechanism. Yet, on the other hand, even with its improvisational quality, the operation of equity leaves a trail of documents, including petitions, pardons, and letters patent. In what follows, I will argue that Trajan’s advocacy of a “lawe of loue” exposes the inadequacies of institutional and textual modes of law, but also that Langland’s continued use of documentary tropes complicates the opposition between codified law and improvisational jurisprudence.

With its irreverent dismissal of books, Trajan’s memorable entrance in B.11 dramatizes the extratextual quality of prerogative justice. He interrupts the narrator’s argument with Scripture, a scene that appropriately issues from Lewte’s caution against overhasty judgment. In frenzied response to Scripture’s warning that many are invited to the “mangerie” of heaven but only a few finally enter the gate to eternal salvation (B.11.112, paraphrasing Matthew 22: 14), the narrator poses contrary evidence from Mark 16: 16, alleging that Christ extends salvation to *all* who believe and who are baptized (B.11.124). Scripture concedes mercy’s supremacy but preserves the authority of the text, granting that “oure bokes telleþ” the power of mercy is “aboue Goddes werkes:/ *Misericordia eius super omnia opera eius*” (B.11.139–a). Trajan’s interjection thus offers not so much a rude contradiction of Scripture’s opinion as a lively example of its truth, especially in C where Trajan introduces himself in the first person:

‘3e, bawe for bokes!’ quod oen was broken out of helle.
 ‘I, Troianus, a trewe knyht, Y take wisse of a pope
 How Y was ded and dampned to dwellen in helle
 For an vnchristene creature; Seynt Gregori woet þe sothe—
 That al þe Cristendoem vnder Crist ne myhte me crache fro thenne,
 But onlyche loue and leaute as in my lawes demynge. (C.12.76–81)

Rather than mounting an argument against book learning, Trajan’s interruption seems designed to offer more direct, *natural* evidence of the plenitude and absolute power of God’s mercy as attested by the textual

authority of the Bible. As Trajan witnesses, God's mercy may extend beyond even the narrator's broad claim for the absolute efficacy of baptism. But the antagonistic tone of Trajan's interruption nevertheless signals an important opposition: a speaking image erupting onto the page, Trajan's vital and lively presence upstages Scripture's merely textual promise by offering more tangible testimony of God's extraordinary mercy, a jurisprudence not bound by letters and precedents.

Langland further highlights the extratextual, extrainstitutional nature of Trajan's salvation in recounting the details of the legend. While Trajan, in a moment of extraordinary performative power, offers himself as a supreme example of God's mercy—"And I saued, *as ye may see*" (B.11.150, my emphasis)—his bombast does not signal pride. He gives all the credit for his salvation to his intercessor Gregory:

Gregorie wiste þis wel, and wilned to my soule
 Sauacion for soopnesse þat he seiz in my werkes.
 And after þat he wepte and wilned me were graunted grace,
 Wipouten any bedde biddynge his boone was vnderfongen,
 And I saued, as ye may see, wipouten syngynge of masses,
 By loue and by lernynge of my lyuynge in truþe,
 Brouzte me fro bitter peyne þer no biddynge myȝte. (B.11.146–52)

According to Trajan's account, the efficacy of Gregory's intervention in his case does not result from his status as a representative of the church. To the extent that it alludes to Peter's power to bind and unbind (B.Pr.100–1), which would certainly be an appropriate reference given Gregory's papal standing, the force of the passage is to draw attention to Trajan's and Gregory's analogous roles as keepers of law while finally stripping away the distinctions between them, as pagan and as Christian, and also between their exalted roles and that of the common man or woman who might likewise witness suffering and injustice and respond, simply and physically, with tears. For Trajan insists that clerical ministrations have no efficacy in his case. The performance of ecclesiastical rituals such as "bedde biddynge" and "syngynge of masses" contributes nothing to his salvation. While Trajan's "laweful domes" and lifetime example of "soopnesse" are paramount (B.11.145, 147), it is Gregory's *personal* response that catalyzes the workings of grace.⁷¹ The causal connection is

⁷¹ I agree with Grady, "Rule of Exceptional Salvations," that Langland "chose to deemphasize the theological side" of Trajan's salvation "and concentrate instead on the ethical side," but unlike Grady, who contends that Langland tells the story in such a way that it "effectively robs Gregory's act of any efficacy whatever," I emphasize the reciprocity of Trajan's and Gregory's roles (pp. 69–70). Finally, in arguing that *Piers Plowman* and *St. Erkenwald* urge their readers to "remember" virtuous pagans of the past (p. 86), Grady's

made even more directly in C: "And *for* a wilnede wepyng þat Y were ysaued,/ God of his goodnesse ysey his grete wille,/ And . . . his bone was vnderfonge,/ And Y saued" (C.12.84–7). Even the syntax of this passage highlights Gregory's role, for Langland does not write that *God* grants Gregory's boon or that God saves Trajan, but describes the dispensation in passive voice, setting the emphasis on Gregory's *initiating* will. The pope's compassion, signified by his tears, represents an ethical stance that foregrounds the principles of "loue and leaute" and serves as a model for the manner in which all those in positions of power and privilege ought to regard those who are in some way dependent upon them to ease their suffering. Like Trajan, Gregory then also renders a "laweful dome" in his generous response to the pagan emperor's plight, leaving judgment to God, as the figure Lewte himself had counseled the narrator just prior to Trajan's appearance: "*Parum lauda; vitupera parcius*" (B.11.106a). Rendering an act of mercy that is at once an act of justice, Gregory, then, judges Trajan by the same measure that the pagan emperor used as a law-giver during his lifetime, the principle of "leaute."

The word "leaute" derives from the Latin "legalitas" through the Old French "leauté," meaning loyalty or allegiance. Middle English usage preserves this feudal association. One may swear by one's "leaute" as on one's honor. The term is also closely associated with principles of truth, fairness, and justice and often functions as a synonym for "equite."⁷² Indeed, like "equite," the word "leaute" sows similar disagreement among modern commentators. Both terms, in their close association with justice and fairness, rest on a conundrum: what does it mean to be *truly just*? Does justice require absolute and impartial adherence to the letter of the law in every case regardless of circumstance, as the description of the *Spiritus Iusticie* seems to suggest? Or does justice consider the particulars of a case and sometimes require a certain flexibility of judgment, as we have seen in the case of Gregory and Trajan?

In associating "leaute" with equitable jurisprudence, I propose a reading that is nearly opposite Donaldson's appraisal of the term as "exact justice:

historical and ethical reading also highlights the role of Gregory and other present-day Christians who are in a position to respond to the virtue of their predecessors.

⁷² MED, s.v. "leaute," n., 1.a–c. Schmidt glosses Lewte as Equity in his edition of the B-text, and Alford lists "equity" among the various legal connotations of the term "leaute." These associations, however, only suggest the standard definitions of equity as justice or fairness, not the historically specific association with the equitable jurisdiction that I suggest. See Alford's list of the term's legal and feudal associations in *A Glossary of Legal Diction*, pp. 83–4.

strict adherence to the letter of the law.”⁷³ Donaldson is right in associating “leaute” with an *idealized* execution of justice, for loyalty to truth is at the heart of the concept. For example, “leaute” is one of the virtues evoked in B.2-4 as a remedy against Meed (e.g. B.2.48, B.3.291-3).⁷⁴ But Donaldson’s definition becomes inadequate as the poem’s complex interrogation of justice develops. Truth and justice would seem to be absolutes. This immutability is precisely what these concepts, personified as Daughters of God in B.18, attempt to prove: “I, Rightwisnesse, recorde þus wiþ Trupe,/ That hir payne be perpetual and no preiere hem helpe” (B.18.198-9). Here is what perfect justice looks like: cause and effect, and an eye for an eye, no petition can stay the sentence of that “botelees bale” (B.18.201). But Langland does not accept this picture of strict justice, neither in theological terms, with regard to eschatological judgment, nor, I would argue, in terms of secular justice, which ought rightly to mirror the divine law, as we have seen that both Hunger and Truth’s pardon demand mercy “for Cristes loue” (B.6.220) and “for Oure Lordes loue” (B.7.49), respectively. In answer to the inflexibility of Truth and Righteousness, Peace appears alongside Mercy, winning the day with a show of prayers and letters. Waving the “patente” sent by her “lemman” Love, the very image of those “prynces lettres” theoretically disqualified by the *Spiritus Justicie* (B.19.310), Peace responds in defiance of her sister’s dismissal of prayer: “And I *shal* preie . . . hir payne moot haue ende” (B.18.202, my emphasis). The mutability of “leaute” is a product of the conflict that this drama stages, namely, that justice and truth are not in fact the absolute concepts we might expect them to be. Both have their corresponding checks, as the four sisters indicate, and both terms, in their near synonymy with God, admit of a capaciousness equal to the divine. If mercy is “aboue Goddes werkes,” as Scripture attests just prior to Trajan’s appearance (*Misericordia eius super omnia opera eius*, B.11.139-a), we also recognize that mercy not only triumphs over strict justice, but that both principles are contained within God’s *opera*, a vision that expands the meaning of justice to harmonize with mercy, just as the allegorical sisters reconcile their debate.⁷⁵ These claims about Langland’s presentation of the

⁷³ Donaldson, *The C-Text and Its Poet*, p. 66, n. 4. See also van Dijk, “Giving Each His Due”: “Equity . . . represents justice *before* it is tempered by the sweetness of mercy” (p. 322).

⁷⁴ Indeed, at B.2.21, Holy Church refers to “Leautee” as her “lemman,” and since Christ is traditionally the bridegroom of the Church, her claims seem to equate Christ and Leautee, a connection that would be consistent with the association of “leaute” and “love” elsewhere in the poem.

⁷⁵ Many of the poem’s commentators have given accounts of its negotiation of justice and mercy. Two of the most indispensable are Stokes, *Justice and Mercy* and Simpson,

dynamic relationship of justice and mercy are not new, but to understand the meaning of “leaute” as loyalty unto truth or unto the law, it is helpful to remind ourselves how forgiving those seemingly absolute terms become in Langland’s treatment of them.

To conclude my discussion of Trajan, I want to highlight the dimension of “leaute” that concerns reciprocity, for it is the notion of loyalty *to* another person that gives the principle its special power to promote mercy. When Lewte appears as a speaking figure just prior to Trajan’s appearance in B.11, his role is to establish the grounds for judgment and reproof, urgent concerns that develop as the *passus* unfolds.⁷⁶ Lewte and the narrator trade contradictory biblical texts, but Lewte ultimately encourages public criticism of open sin—“[p]yng þat al þe world woot”—though not of “þyng þat is pryue” (B.11.101, 105). While legitimating judgment, Lewte demands that the circumstances of cases must be carefully scrutinized before publicizing blame, and even then, as his Senecan maxim requires, blame should be used sparingly (B.11.106a). In setting the stage for Trajan’s account, Lewte’s promotion of forbearance in law rules out Donaldson’s definition of the term as “strict justice” and better explains the term’s frequent association with love in alliterative collocations. My reading of “leaute” in this respect accords with Kean’s argument that it gestures toward Aristotelian justice, which is defined by Aquinas as “virtue directed toward one’s neighbor.”⁷⁷ Whether we call this principle “leaute,” equity, mercy, love, or, simply, being “kynde,” it is clear that Langland’s ideal of justice must include compassion for the one who suffers both in sinning and in bearing the punishment of sin.

For Langland, rules governing judgment and blame slide seamlessly from admonitions to forbear to injunctions actively *to* bear others’ burdens, whether those hardships are defined as personal shortcomings, manifest sinfulness, or physical and spiritual needs. As we have seen, Hunger makes the equation between forbearance and burden bearing explicit in citing Galatians 6: 2: “*Alter alterius onera portate*” (B.6.220–1a). In its biblical context, this line immediately concerns forbearance of judgment against

“Spirituality and Economics in *Passus* 1–7 of the B-Text,” *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 1 (1987): pp. 83–103.

⁷⁶ On Lewte’s role as “the poem’s great champion of fraternal correction as an obligatory charitable practice founded in evangelical law,” see Edwin D. Craun, *Ethics and Power in Medieval English Reformist Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 71. Although Craun specifically addresses Lewte’s involvement with clerical reproof, his definition of Lewte as “a central figure for lawfulness and for loyalty to the community and to others” (p. 61) complements my own view that *leaute* indicates the role of forbearance in judgment and correction more generally.

⁷⁷ Kean, “Love, Law, and *Lewte*,” p. 256. See Aquinas’s definition of justice in *Summa theologiae* II.2.q. 58.

the faults of others, but in Langland's use here, as well as in biblical commentaries, the injunction against blame quickly becomes an *injunction to* active charity. Jerome's commentary on Galatians 6: 2 exemplifies the practice:

he fulfills the Law of Christ through love who does not despair over a brother's salvation but extends a hand to him when he asks for it, weeps with all his heart with the one who weeps, is weak with the one who is weak, and regards another's sins as his own. What is the Law of Christ? "This is my commandment: that you love one another, just as I have loved you" [John 15: 12] . . . He has not fulfilled the Law of Christ who, even if he is spiritual, has no clemency and has not put on the bowels of compassion and tears.⁷⁸

Like *Liberum Arbitrium's* description of the "childische" Charity, Jerome's commentary on Paul's command that we bear one another's burdens imagines charity as capable of extraordinary feats of compassion in its most radical sense as feeling *with* the other (C.16.298). As we proceed further to examine the Trajan episode and several linked episodes, I suggest that Langland's notion of "leaute" shares in Jerome's Pauline spirit of loyalty not to a strict interpretation of law, but of loyalty to one's brother through loyalty to the law of Christ.

The long speech that follows Trajan's interruption of Scripture in lines B.11.153–318 offers one of the poem's most eloquent defenses of charity as neighborly burden-bearing in the tradition of Jerome's exemplary association of compassionate response, the *lex Christi*, and the law of love. Before proceeding, however, it will be necessary to make some decisions about who exactly is speaking in these lines, as their textual presentation leaves readers in disagreement. In the B version, Kane-Donaldson ascribe the lines following Trajan's interruption to the narrator (B.11.153–69 and 171–318) while Schmidt attaches them to Trajan's foregoing speech, essentially giving the entire passage to Trajan. Schmidt's solution requires Trajan to speak of himself in the third person—"Lo! ye lordes, what leautee did by an Emperour of Rome" (B.11.153)—but this bombastic style seems to me to match his opening presentation and suits his rhetorical aims as well. From the start Trajan emphasizes his living, visual testimony. Trajan invites his audience not only to read or hear his words, but also to imagine his presence. This speaking presence is in fact what gives Trajan's testimony its authority. Here he stands, saved from the pain of hell "as ye may see" (B.11.150). It is then fully in keeping with

⁷⁸ Jerome, *Commentary on Galatians*, trans. Andrew Cain. *Fathers of the Church*, vol. 121. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), p. 250. On the phrase "bowels of compassion," see Mann, "Nature of Need," p. 25, who traces the phrase to Hugh of St. Cher's commentary on Luke 12.

Trajan's characterization that he would once more address his audience as the speech proceeds, again demanding an ocular response: "Lo!"

In the C-text, however, the problematic speech is greatly extended while Trajan's role is undoubtedly minimized. As the passage proceeds in the B-text, we are helped by a brief interjection specifically attributed to Trajan: "'Lawe wiþouten loue,' *quod Troianus*, 'ley þer a bene—'" (B.11.170, my emphasis). This second reference to Trajan as speaker can be seen to support Schmidt's attribution of the whole passage to Trajan (suggesting that he is still speaking), but it can also be shown to support Kane-Donaldson by reserving this line *alone* for Trajan. C omits the problematic speech marker as well as several lines detailing Trajan's escape from hell; instead, the long speech that follows, including an expanded lesson on the virtues of poverty, belongs to Rechelesnesse, who is identified as the speaker at C.13.129. As Schmidt acknowledges, this ascription to Rechelesnesse favors Kane-Donaldson's association of the lines with the narrator in B, since the C-text uses Rechelesnesse as an alter ego for the narrator in this sequence.⁷⁹ But if the shift to Rechelesnesse clarifies textual uncertainties, it exacerbates the difficulty of discerning the authority of the views proposed in the speech. With regard to its celebration of poverty, the passage has been variously interpreted as a sign of Langland's derision of or support for Franciscanism.⁸⁰ Commenting on its opposition to Clergy, Derek Pearsall notes that Rechelesnesse's speech is "recklessly simple" and "ends... with a decisive repudiation of his opinions."⁸¹ My preference is to read Rechelesnesse, like Meed and Need, as yet another of Langland's complicated terms of dual or multiple valence. As I have argued in Chapter 3, even when the narrator is at his most recalcitrant—as when he "resonede Resoun" during the Vision of Kynde, an angry response foreshadowed in C by Rechelesnesse's "rage" when he "aresenede Clergie" (C.13.129)—Langland exploits his protagonist's wrongheadedness to advance a claim or complaint that, although technically flawed, nevertheless conveys a certain validity or instructive counterargument. That is, Rechelesnesse's authority may be limited by his constitutional inability to take a balanced approach to the value of clergy,

⁷⁹ Schmidt, *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C and Z Versions*, Vol. 2, Part 1: Introduction and Textual Notes, p. 400. Clopper explores the association of Rechelesnesse and Langland's persona in "*Songes of Rechelesnesse*," especially pp. 299–323.

⁸⁰ Clopper, "*Songes of Rechelesnesse*," for example, reads Rechelesnesse as an embodiment of the Franciscan ideal of the absence of solicitude, though he admits that Rechelesnesse himself fails to live up to the ideal he advocates. By contrast, Aers argues in *Sanctifying Signs*, pp. 99–156, that through Rechelesnesse and Patience Langland represents but ultimately rejects the Franciscan idealization of poverty.

⁸¹ Pearsall, *Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition of the C-text*, n. 89, n. 129.

but his articulation of the “law of loue” is at the heart of the poem’s theology. It would not be out of place in the mouth of Holy Church, Piers, or even Christ himself, who voice quite similar claims in *Piers Plowman*.⁸² Because I attend primarily to this section of the poem in the B-text and accept Schmidt’s interpretation for the reasons outlined above, I attribute the celebration of charity following Trajan’s introduction to Trajan. But I would suggest that the imprecision among possible speakers here should not trouble us too much. Whether these lines are attributed to Trajan, the narrator, or Rechelesnesse, all three candidates are mouthpieces for a shared cause: all three speak from the edges of authority, hopeful (if “recklessly” so) about the power of love to soften the formalism of clerical and legal decrees.

Returning to the troublesome speech that follows Trajan’s self-introduction, we are now in a better position to see how it supports the claim that “leaute” is a principle of compassion. When the speaker, whom I continue to identify as Trajan, calls attention to “what leautee dide by an Emperour of Rome,” Langland glosses the term by adding, “Nouȝt þoruȝ preiere of a pope but for his pure truþe/ Was þat Sarsen saued” (B.11.153, 155). We may identify “leautee” in line 153 with “pure truth” in the next, a definition that accords with established Middle English usage. Yet we should note the syntactic ambiguity in these lines: does “his pure truþe” refer to the aforementioned “pope” or to “that Sarsen”? Whose commitment to “truþe” effected Trajan’s salvation? I suggest that “pure truth” belongs to both figures, Trajan for his “lawful domes,” and Gregory for his compassionate, “leel” reaction to Trajan’s suffering. The ambiguity of this line is significant since, as we have seen, “leaute” often denotes relationships of reciprocal obligation. Trajan is saved because he and Gregory *both* upheld their commitment to “truþe.” Trajan’s record is the starting point, but Gregory’s response is decisive: in demonstrating his loyalty to Trajan by wishing for the emperor’s salvation, he fulfills a promise of allegiance not codified in an oath or in actual legal terms but based on the implicit demands of human kinship, a prayer for mercy that recalls Piers’s bid to stay Hunger in B.6 and anticipates Christ’s speech in B.18: “I were an vnkynde kyng but I my kyn holpe” (B.18.399). The story of Trajan’s salvation hinges on “fellow feeling,” an emotional, experiential, or in Langlandian terms, “kynde” response to suffering before the law.

⁸² See, for example, Holy Church’s celebration of love as a “mene” who serves king and commons and shapes the law at B.1.160–1; Piers’s naming of love as the motivation for his labor, by which he provides “liflode” for the community at B.6.17–18; and Christ’s declaration that love is the drink for which he “deide vpon erþe” at B.18.366–7. For each of these figures, love is a law that compels ethical labor.

Following Jerome's model for one who fulfills Christ's law by bearing his brother's burdens, Gregory has "put on the bowels of compassion and tears." Moreover, Gregory's "leaute" extends beyond his loyalty to Trajan: it stems from his loyalty to Christ, for whose love he loves his brother Trajan.

Trajan's ensuing speech is, in response, an elaboration of the principles that saved him and an injunction to further acts of charity. Just as his living example impugns books in his opening salvo, Trajan likewise devalues "lawe wipouten loue," a "science" that is worthless unless tempered by compassion:

For Seint Johan seide it, and soþe arn hise wordes:
Qui non diligit manet in morte.
 Whoso loueþ noȝt, leue me, he lyueþ in deep deyinge;
 And þat alle manere men, enemyes and frendes,
 Loue hir eyþer ooþer, and lene hem as hemselue.
 Whoso lenen noȝt, he loueþ noȝt. (B.11.175–9)

The charges are even more explicit as voiced by Rechelesnesse in the C version: "So loue and leute ben Oure Lordes bokes/ And Cristis ounre clergie—he cam fro heuene to teche hit,/ And Seynt Ion sethen saide hit of his techyng:/ *Qui non diligit manet in morte*" (C.12.98–101a). Continuing the practice Trajan's opening "baw" inaugurates, both speakers marshal biblical support to cast doubt on the authority of books. Indeed, Rechelesnesse replaces physical texts ("bokes") with "loue and leute," suggesting that adherence to and action in accord with the principles set out in scripture are worth more than the mere text itself, much as Holy Church derides "chastite wipouten charite" (B.1.188).

While Rechelesnesse's disregard for the clergy of this world is allegorically predictable, we might expect Trajan, renowned for his "laweful domes," to speak for the law; instead, citing the Gospel as proof, like Hunger before him he becomes an unexpected and eloquent advocate of forbearance and love (B.11.145). Eschewing an unbending law that punishes wrongdoers with absolute justice, Trajan instead urges pity and compassion on Gregory's model—the law of neighborly love—as the most effective remedy for the suffering and social disintegration that sin produces. It is appropriate then that, a few lines later, Trajan reintroduces the key text from Galatians 6: 2 quoted several passūs earlier by Hunger. Like Hunger, and like Jerome, Trajan interprets the line as an imperative to charity and the suspension of judgment:

Forþi loue we as leue children shal, and ech man lauȝe vp ooþer,
 And of þat ech man may forbere, amende þere it nedep,
 And euery man helpe ooþer—for hennes shul we alle:
Alter alterius onera portate. (B.11.208–10a)

Again anticipating Liberum Arbitrium's description of Charity's affective plasticity, Trajan urges his audience to adopt a similarly "childische" openness to love (C.16.296). But whereas Liberum Arbitrium cites Matthew 7: 12 as support, borrowing the same biblical text that Gratian used to link the natural law to the golden rule, Trajan bases his imperative to charity on an even more direct model of ethical identification. The golden rule requires its adherents to put themselves in another person's shoes, precisely as Liberum Arbitrium describes Charity's behavior in C.16: he is "glad with alle glade, as gurlen þat lawhen alle,/ And sory when he seth men sory—as thow seest childerne/ Lawhe þer men lawheth and loure þer opere louren" (C.16.300–2). For Trajan, too, this identification manifests as laughter, as he enjoins "ech man" that he "lauze vp ooper," that is, laugh with one another, or more idiomatically, look with favor on, or rejoice in one's fellows (*MED*, s.v. "laughen," v., sense 3a, 3d).⁸³ As in the Charity passage, here laughter signifies a softening of boundaries between individuals, a relaxation of judgment commensurate with the shouldering of another's burden.

Langland signals his awareness of the biblical context by moving from forbearance and amendment—the precise issues at hand in Galatians 6: 2—to the bearing of burdens as distribution of physical and spiritual goods, "catel" and "konnyng" (B.11.211). Yet in Trajan's speech the call to charity does not depend on the imaginative abstraction of the golden rule but proceeds more directly from the bond of kinship itself. In the lines immediately preceding the call to forbearance and charity Trajan elaborates a radically inclusive Christian lineage: "For alle are we Cristes creatures, and of his cofres riche,/ And breþeren as of oo blood, as wel beggeres as erles" (B.11.198–9). Christ's bloodshed inaugurates a new time, a new integration of the human community that levels rich and poor:

In þe olde lawe, as þe lettre telleþ, 'mennes sones' men called vs,
Of Adames issue and Eue, ay til God-Man deide;
And after his resurexcion *Redemptor* was his name,
And we his breþeren þoruþ hym ybouzt, boþe riche and pouere.
Forþi loue we as leue children shal. (B.11.204–8)

Once again the Old Law emblemizes the letter that damns. "As *þe lettre telleþ*," the Old Testament is a record of sin and human limitation that binds human beings to an ineluctable debt and the mortality of their kind as "mennes sones." But Christ's redemption of that heritage of debt

⁸³ R. James Goldstein surveys Langland's complex treatment of laughter in "Ve vobis qui ridetis (Lk 6.25): Laughter in *Piers Plowman*," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 29 (2015): pp. 25–60.

purchases (“þoruȝ hym ybouȝt”) a new family tree, a promise of immortality based on kinship with the “God-man.” Kinship in Christ thus becomes a warrant for charitable action. The imperative to love one another “as leue children” becomes more urgent and more literal, for in Christ’s unification of humankind, every person is at once a child of the Creator, a brother to Christ, and a sibling to fellow humans. This leveling effect demands that every person bear with one another because all are destined for the same mortal end, regardless of status: “for hennes shul we all” (B.11.210). I suggest that this line is not simply a reminder of death but a reminder of shared physical needs—that all mortal bodies suffer hunger, thirst, and cold alike—and of shared *spiritual* needs, not provisions against the elements, but against Judgment Day.⁸⁴ As I will discuss further in Chapter 5, these two sets of needs, of “catel” and of “konnyng,” become vitally intertwined in the rest of Trajan’s speech and the several *passūs* following it.

Trajan may be an unlikely spokesperson for the Christological basis of salvation, and perhaps these lines better support Kane-Donaldson’s attribution of the speech to the narrator, for its confidence in the absolute and universal efficacy of Christ’s redemption could be seen to share the complacency of the narrator’s argument at the start of B.11 that baptism alone suffices. Indeed Trajan proceeds to impugn clergy further, arguing that “whateuere clerkes carpe of Cristendom or ellis,” Christ himself promised that “*Fides sua* sholde sauen hire” (B.11.215–17, citing Luke 7: 50). But we should note that Trajan *does not* say that Christ’s sacrifice saves all; rather, as the conjunctive “Forþi” at line 208 indicates, the new lineage that Christ’s Incarnation effects is not only a gift to “mennes sones” but a call to action. Because human beings are now “Cristes creatures” they are obligated to behave accordingly, that is, by assisting one another in need (B.11.198).

Langland might be seen to take a more conservative tack in the C revision. The phrase “Cristes creatures” is gone as is the claim that faith alone suffices, but the claim to kinship in Christ remains, as does the passing of the “olde lawe” to the new with the sacrifice of “God-Man” and his inauguration of a merciful law of love and mutual assistance (C.12.110–20). Significantly, though, in C Langland replaces the citation of Galatians 6: 2 with another familiar text and a warning that the principles of justice remain in effect:

⁸⁴ Scott observes the similarly inclusive language that Piers and Hunger use to describe the obligation to charity, which likewise sets earthly judgments within the “larger context” of Judgment Day (“*Piers Plowman*” and *the Poor*, p. 106).

Forthy loue we as leue childerne, and lene hem þat nedeth,
 And euery man helpe other—for hennes shal we alle
 To have as we haen serued, as Holy Chirche witnesseth:
Et qui bona egerunt, ibunt in vitam eternam. (C.12.118–20a)

Whereas the B-text celebrates communal burden-bearing (“And euery man helpe ooper,” B.11.210), C emphasizes the individual accountability already implicit in B’s address to “ech man.” Langland amplifies the emphasis on the individual reckoning by replacing Galatians 6: 2 with the line from the Athanasian Creed that so perplexed the priest who can find no pardon in it in B.7 (B.7.110a).⁸⁵ The call to charity remains, but this time the imperative has teeth. Whereas B evoked the golden rule, now we see its principle of exchange from the other side: when we have gone “hennes,” every person shall receive judgment “as we haen serued” (C.12.120). Each person will then be treated as he or she treated others during his or her lifetime.

And yet, for all these changes, the B-text ultimately reaches the same conclusion in a passage excised from C that follows directly on its citation of Galatians. Elaborating the power of “bileue,” Trajan concludes by citing Matthew 7: 2: “*Eadem mensura qua mensi fueritis remecietur vobis*” (B.11.226a; and compare Holy Church’s citation of the same text at B.1.178). As in C, the emphasis is on measure, a reminder that each person shall be judged by the same measure that he or she used to judge others. Whether we understand the speaker here to be Trajan or the narrator, the return to measure is perfectly suited to the story of Trajan’s salvation as we have been discussing it. He is for Langland a symbol of how mercy can make the law *more just*. Justice, in the basic sense of balance or measure, need not only mean an eye for an eye, but kindness for kindness, too. This is why in both versions of the poem the return of justice—either in the form of the Athanasian Creed or Matthew 7: 2—is immediately followed by an imperative to a new law: “Forþi lerne we þe lawe of loue as Oure Lord tauȝte” (B.11.227 and see C.12.121).

Langland’s “lawe of kynde” finally voices a hopefulness that God will judge humanity with the same measure of compassion that binds human beings to one another and moves Piers, Gregory, and even Christ to pray for mercy in *Piers Plowman*. Whereas, in B, Trajan had impugned “law withouten loue,” in C Langland provides a gloss, substituting for “loue” that other keyword, “leaute.” Indeed, throughout Rechelesnesse’s speech,

⁸⁵ On this line from the Athanasian Creed as a contract, see Steiner, *Documentary Culture*, pp. 124–42.

and in the C-text more generally, Langland amplifies his use of “leaute.”⁸⁶ As in B Langland interpolates an audience of law keepers, but in C, the lines now spoken by Rechelesnesse replace B’s imperative—“do truþe to þe peple” (B.11.158)—with a more specific demand:

Wel ouhte 3e lordes þat lawes kepeth this lesson to haue in mynde,
And on Troianes treuthe to thenke alle tymes in 3oure lyue
And louye for Oure Lordes loue and do leute evermore. (C.12.91–3)

As we have seen, “doing truth” is one aspect of “leaute,” but it does not fully encompass the imperative to mercy that I have argued “leaute” implies. In designating “Troianes treuthe” as a touchstone for those who keep the law, the C-text glosses “treuthe” with the particular responses of “loue” and “leaute,” emphasizing the source of both in “Oure Lordes loue” (C.12.93). That is, C claims that law keepers should practice law with compassion *because of* (“for”) their love of God but also because God’s love underwrites and models this type of jurisprudence. We have already seen how Langland deploys similar appeals to divine love as a warrant for mercy in law in the speech of Hunger (B.6.220–1), and in the appeal to lawyers in Truth’s pardon: “*for Oure Lordes love* lawe for hym sheweth” (B.7.49, my emphasis). In each of these cases, love bends the process of law, based on the idea that a divine law exists outside of and takes precedent over the many manifestations of positive law. In tasking his contemporaries, lords who keep the law, to observe this principle of jurisprudence—“do leute evermore”—Langland interposes a “lawe of loue,” urging an unwritten ethical principle into the realms of legal and social practice.

⁸⁶ On the amplification of “leaute” in the C-text, see Charlotte Clutterbuck, “Hope and Good Works: Leaute in the C-Text of *Piers Plowman*,” *Review of English Studies* 28 (1977): pp. 129–40. Clutterbuck accepts Kean’s association of “leaute” with the Aristotelian virtue of justice but argues that it also bears a theological dimension that associates it with hope. Specifically, for Clutterbuck, “leaute” is the “hope which is justified by the good works on which it is based” (p. 140).

5

“Fullynge” *Kynde*

Nature, Salvation, and Human Action in *Piers Plowman*

For euery Cristene creature sholde be kynde til ooper,
And siþen heþen to helpe in hope of amendement.

Piers Plowman B.10.363–4

Beaute sanz bounte, blessed was hit neuere,
Ne kynde *sanz cortesie* in no contreye is preysed.

Piers Plowman C.17.163–4

Taking up the previous chapter’s exploration of exceptions to the law, this chapter focuses on the issue of non-Christian salvation apart from the exemplary figure Trajan. Non-Christians present a particular challenge for the poem’s evaluation of nature and natural capacity, especially when they are represented through figures of uncultivated nature—as wild animals, as a barren field, as a newborn baby—in speeches by Anima in B and Liberum Arbitrium in C. If these representations complicate the optimistic assessment of nature presented in previous chapters, they also reveal that in confronting the deficiencies of nature, Langland presents his most forceful argument for the necessity of human action as a fulfillment of the created order established by God.

B.15 in particular develops a suggestive vocabulary of fulfillment through Anima’s comparison of non-Christians to raw or “unfulled” cloth. Anima’s analogy is based on a pun on the verb “fullen,” which refers to the fuller’s trade of cloth-making, but more broadly means “to make full,” “to complete,” or “to finish.” In this sense, “fullen” describes the spiritual work of the Holy Ghost, an association through which the term also comes to denote the sacrament of baptism.¹ Prior to the analogy

¹ MED, s.v. “fullen,” verb, 1.b. See Skeat’s note on the process of “fullynge” cloth in *The Vision of William*, 2: p. 229.

of the rough cloth, Anima draws on this spiritual meaning of "fullen" when he recounts Augustine of Canterbury's mission to convert the Anglo-Saxons, whom he "follede . . . faste, and þe feiþ tauȝte" (B.15.447). Now, turning from exemplary history to the problem of contemporary non-Christians, Anima elaborates the concept of "fullynge" as an act of physical refinement:

Cloof þat comeþ fro þe weuyng is noȝt comly to were
Til it is fulled vnder foot or in fullyng stokkes,
Wasshen wel wiþ water and wiþ taseles cracched,
Ytoked and yteynted and vnder taillours hande;
And so it fareþ by a barn þat born is of wombe:
Til it be cristned in Cristes name and confermed of þe bisshop,
It is heþene as to heueneward, and helples to þe soule. (B.15.451–7)

Here Anima compares the physical work of fullers of cloth to the spiritual work of fullers of human souls. Both take raw material, as it were, and give it form, making it "comly," or pleasing—to the touch of one who would "were" it, in the case of cloth, and to God who judges its merit "to heueneward," in the case of the soul. The comparison, which is part of a linked series of analogies, which I discuss more fully below, describes non-Christians as paradigmatic figures of nature and so presents them as a test case for its value.

In this book's Introduction I described the Samaritan's reading of the human hand as an example of how *kynde* prompts and enables ethical action, not just in response to lack, but on the model of the divine plenitude that is its source. A reminder of its creator's triune nature, the hand is simultaneously the product of trinitarian charity and the instrument of its ongoing work, as the Samaritan's teachings and ministrations alike demonstrate. In this chapter, I argue that in the poem's meditations on the problem of contemporary non-Christians Langland envisions *kynde* as a site of cooperative action between God "þat al bygan" (C.19.113) and the human agents—specifically the Christian clergy—who are charged with "fullynge" the potential latent in nature. As James Simpson has said, in *Piers Plowman* "grace is managed in a thoroughly decentralized way, dependent for its distribution on both the initiative of the individual Christian and the integrity of an Apostolic, demotic church."² Here our focus is on the distributive channel of the Christian clergy, whom Anima and Liberum Arbitrium describe as natural agents of supernatural grace.

² Simpson, "Grace Abounding: Evangelical Centralization and the End of *Piers Plowman*," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 14 (2000): p. 71.

UNIVERSALISM AND CONVERSION

In B.15, the figure Anima devotes particular attention to the evangelical commitment of the early Christian church, a determination that he perceives to be notably lacking among its contemporary clergy:

‘What pope or prelat now parfournep þat Crist hizte—

Ite in uniuersum mundum et predicate . . . ?

Allas, þat men so longe on Makometh sholde bileue!’ (B.15.490–2)

Anima’s lament for the abandoned evangelical mission announces the important place of conversion within the poem’s scheme of charity. Recent considerations of non-Christians in *Piers Plowman* have uncovered Langland’s speculative engagement with ideas of exceptional and universal salvation, notions that, in their varied formulations, offered a more inclusive vision of salvation than strict doctrinal interpretations might allow.³ Such readings, however, fail to reconcile the poem’s universalist ethic with Anima’s exhortations in B.15 to convert the “[r]ude” non-Christians (B.15.460).⁴ As Robert Adams observes, “the note sounded [in Anima’s speech] is much more conservative than that of the prior episodes.”⁵ In exploring Anima’s appeals for an expansion of the Christian community through a form of charity that distributes not alms but belief

³ A rich scholarly tradition traces universal and exceptional salvation in *Piers Plowman*. See T.P. Dunning, “Langland and the Salvation of the Heathen,” *Medium Aevum* 12 (1943): pp. 45–54; G.H. Russell, “The Salvation of the Heathen: The Exploration of a Theme in *Piers Plowman*,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 29 (1966): pp. 101–16; Coleman, “*Piers Plowman*” and the Moderni, pp. 108–46; Gradon, “*Trajanus Redivivus*,” pp. 93–114; Cindy L. Vitto, *The Virtuous Pagan in Middle English Literature*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, vol. 79, part 5 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1989), pp. 60–88; Thomas D. Hill, “Universal Salvation and Its Literary Context in *Piers Plowman* B.19,” *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 5 (1991): pp. 65–76; Grady, “Rule of Exceptional Salvations”; Watson, “Visions of Inclusion”; Kerby-Fulton, *Books under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writing in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), especially pp. 378–83; and Pearsall, “The Idea of Universal Salvation in *Piers Plowman* B and C,” pp. 257–81.

⁴ A few studies have broached the question of evangelism in the poem, notably the following: Michael R. Paull, “Mahomet and the Conversion of the Heathen in *Piers Plowman*,” *English Language Notes* 10:1 (1972): pp. 1–8; Barney, “The Plowshare of the Tongue,” especially pp. 278–9; Coleman, “*Piers Plowman*” and the Moderni, pp. 140–1; Adams, “Langland’s Theology,” pp. 100–1; Lawrence Warner, “Becket and the Hopping Bishops,” pp. 107–34; and Emily Steiner, “Radical Historiography: Langland, Trevisa, and the *Polychronicon*,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 27 (2005): pp. 171–211.

⁵ Adams, “Langland’s Theology,” pp. 100–1. On the idea that this passage reveals a shift in Langland’s view of the sacramental necessity of baptism see Coleman, “*Piers Plowman*” and the Moderni, pp. 140–6.

itself, this chapter draws attention to the more cautious discourse of conversion that exists in the poem alongside its universalism, a term that I use not to indicate Langland's support for universal salvation per se but in a broader sense to characterize Langland's theory of *kynde* interconnectedness, a theme expressed in the poem's frequent exhortations to charity and mutual burden-bearing, which I discussed in Chapter 4. The poem's hopefulness about a merciful final judgment—whether it be defined as universal, exceptional, or simply inclusive—is one expression of this universalist ethic, and its calls to evangelize and convert are another.

To set the context for Anima's speech, which contains a careful defense of conversion best apprehended within the larger debates ongoing in the poem, I begin with a brief review of some critical assessments of the poem's engagement with theories of universal salvation. I will then examine the two competing visions of nature from which I argue the poem's treatment of non-Christians emerges. As we have seen in previous chapters, the poem's assertions that God has provisioned nature to sustain every creature are met in fact with the manifest problem of need in the world. The poem's definition of charity addresses this impasse, suggesting that God's design calls for loving human action as *part of* nature's provision. In other words, the sufficiency built into the natural world relies not only on honest production and measured consumption, but, as Piers learns on the half-acre, on acts of loving intervention by human intermediaries who ensure that sustenance is apportioned to those in need. Not surprisingly, as God's agents on earth, members of the Christian clergy bear the greatest responsibility for maintaining this balance of goods, a duty that encompasses the distribution of both temporal and spiritual forms of sustenance, and as Anima insists, the clerical responsibility for spiritual charity extends beyond the Christian community to those non-Christians who need it most.

Theories of universal salvation find patristic roots in Origen's doctrine of *apocatastasis*, a Neoplatonic vision of restoration accomplished through the purification of souls.⁶ Although Origen's daring speculation was

⁶ For a detailed study of Origen's thought, influences, and reception, see the following: Ralph V. Turner, "Descendit ad inferos: Medieval Views on Christ's Descent into Hell and the Salvation of the Ancient Just," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27 (1966): pp. 173–94; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 123–55; Vitto, *The Virtuous Pagan*, pp. 5–35; Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Future Hope in Early Christianity*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), pp. 127–41. Augustine attacks notions of universal salvation in *De civitate Dei*, Book 21. On Walter Hilton's fourteenth-century revival of the Augustinian argument against *apocatastasis*, see Watson, "Visions of Inclusion," pp. 146–8.

condemned by the Second Council of Constantinople in 553, the church fathers and later theologians continued to formulate circumstances that might mitigate the sufferings of sinners and non-Christians and ultimately permit a more inclusive, if not completely universal, salvation.⁷ Hopeful speculations about God's mercy remained a widespread topic in fourteenth-century England, and not only among clerical elites.⁸ In an influential pair of articles, Nicholas Watson has linked expressions of universal salvation in late medieval England to the rise of the vernacular, particularly as a medium for theological discussion.⁹ "[T]he universality of divine forgiveness offered readers by Julian of Norwich, William Langland, and perhaps others is in part a theological analogue of the universality which was coming to be attributed to the vernacular language itself," Watson argues.¹⁰ The English language, in other words, acted as an instrument of access and unification that had theological and devotional implications. In diminishing, if not altogether removing, the barriers of education and class that were reinforced by Latin and French, English promoted a sense of social connectedness while empowering the laity to think of themselves as full participants in the church and thus to consider theological issues by their own standards and desires, leading some to imagine an afterlife patterned on the inclusivity their vernacular language promoted in the present life.

A strong current of universalist thought certainly informs the ethical demands of *Piers Plowman*. In observing Langland's inclusiveness, however, we should not overlook the sharp lines of division upheld in the poem but instead consider how the poem works to exclude non-Christians even as it urges expansion and reintegration of the Christian community through their conversion. Commentary on Langland's universalism typically focuses on Christ's speech during the poem's depiction of the Harrowing of Hell in B.18. Looking forward to Judgment Day, Christ promises that he will return as a king and "haue out of helle alle mennes soules" (B.18.373):

Ac to be merciabbe to man þanne, my kynde it askep,
For we bep breperen of blood, but noȝt in baptisme alle.

⁷ On the reception and influence of "apocatastasis," see C.A. Patrides, "Salvation of Satan," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 28 (1967): pp. 467–87.

⁸ C. David Benson, *Public "Piers Plowman": Modern Scholarship and Late Medieval English Culture* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), has argued that universal salvation circulated as "an open question in public culture" in fourteenth-century England (p. 148). See also Watson, "Visions of Inclusion."

⁹ Watson, "Visions of Inclusion" and "Conceptions of the Word: The Mother Tongue and the Incarnation of God," *New Medieval Literatures* 1 (1997): pp. 85–124.

¹⁰ Watson, "Visions of Inclusion," p. 146.

Ac alle þat beþ myne hole breþeren, in blood and in baptisme,
Shul noȝt be dampned to þe deef þat is wiþouten ende:

Tibi soli peccavi . . .

And þouȝ Holy Writ wole þat I be wroke of hem þat didnen ille
(*Nullum malum impunitum . . .*)

Thei shul be clensed clerliche and clene wasshen of hir synnes

In my prisone Purgatorie, til *parce* it hote.

And my mercy shal be shewed to manye of my breþeren;

For blood may suffre blood boþe hungry and acale,

Ac blood may noȝt se blood blede, but hym rewe. (B.18. 376–9a, 391–6)

Christ intriguingly hints that his kinship with humankind, the shared "kynde" that he has adopted through his Incarnation (B.18.376), will move him to extend his mercy broadly on Judgment Day, and readers have rightly interpreted this testament of Christ's pity for his brethren as the basis for Langland's eloquent reconciliation of justice and mercy in this passus.¹¹ As Watson demonstrates, Christ's promise of mercy articulates Christ's fundamental kinship with creation, a bond reflected in the vernacular language itself: "With a brilliant set of puns on 'un~~ky~~nde,' 'kyng,' and 'kyn,' Langland fuses Christ's divine righteousness as king with the mercy he must by nature show his subjects as their kin."¹²

Yet just how close the ties of kinship must be to merit salvation is not made absolutely clear. As Derek Pearsall observes, Christ's speech is "heavily qualified."¹³ Far from promising universal salvation, Christ draws a distinction between the baptized, his "hole breþeren" (B.18.378), and those who, for whatever reason, remain unbaptized. While Christ declares that those who are his brothers "in blood and in baptisme,/ Shul noȝt be dampned to þe deef þat is wiþouten ende," he does not extend such complete assurance to those who are his brothers only by the blood of shared humanity, a relation the C-text describes with the term "halue-bretherne" (B.18.378–9; C.20.436). Instead, Christ refers to the cleansing mechanism of Purgatory and loosely declares that his "mercy shal be shewed to *manye* of

¹¹ See Davlin, "Kynde Knowynge as a Major Theme" and Mann, "Eating and Drinking."

¹² Watson, "Visions of Inclusion," p. 159. On the poem's representation of the bonds of kinship, see also Tavormina, *Kindly Similitude*.

¹³ Pearsall, "The Idea of Universal Salvation," reads in this speech's typically Langlandian "backwards and forwards, sidling and spiraling movement" a struggle to come to terms with the poem's most insistent questions about salvation (pp. 273, 275). In fact, Pearsall understands Christ's speech as the culmination of Langland's thinking on the subject of salvation, insisting, rather contrary to the motion of Langland's own recursive tendencies, that we "respect the poem's narrative sequence" and "trace the course of Langland's salvation thinking through the poem, both in B and C" (pp. 260–1). While we can hardly find a more authoritative speaker in the poem than Christ himself, my own discussion does not treat Christ's qualified speech as an endpoint, but sets it within the poem's more varied hopes for broadening the scope of salvation.

[his] breperen" (B.18.394, emphasis added). Though it gestures toward a universal vision, Christ's speech cautiously stops short of declaring ultimate salvation for all of humankind, leaving the unbaptized with some hope, yet still on the fringes of the Christian community. Kinship by blood alone, a natural relation, is not enough to guarantee salvation; instead, full kinship with Christ adds to the natural bond a supernatural bond of faith, the steadfast connection imparted by baptism.

In part to address this ambiguity in Christ's speech, I consider non-Christians in *Piers Plowman* in the context of a more cautious discourse of conversion that exists in the poem alongside Langland's evident attraction to the prospect of universal salvation. Most considerations of universal and exceptional salvation in the poem focus on Trajan and other historical non-Christians.¹⁴ As we have seen, however, Langland also addresses the status of *contemporary* non-Christians, those who still have the opportunity to accept Christianity. Far from assuring the reader that these living non-Christians may ultimately be saved when Christ extends his abundant mercy, their existence instead prompts a call for immediate action on the part of Christians, especially the clergy. While Langland's promotion of conversion does not rule out hope for some form of inclusive salvation, such passages act as a cautionary balance to the necessarily speculative idea of universal salvation hinted at in Christ's speech and other points throughout the poem. Rather than trusting that God will view difference with mercy, proponents of conversion instead seek actively to assimilate non-Christians by "forming" them with the Christian faith, as Anima urges (B.15.450).

If, as Watson has argued, the idea of universal salvation, in a sense comes *naturally* to English speakers—"a theme that somehow *belongs* to the vernacular"—so also, the poem suggests, should Christian efforts to convert non-Christians.¹⁵ As Christ's "kynde" produces the logic for a merciful judgment, at least for his "hole breperen" if not for all his kin, so also the interconnectedness of the natural world, a fact highlighted by Langland's designation of God the "[f]ader and formour" as Kynde, institutes an ethics of nature that encourages measures to incorporate non-Christians more fully into Christ's community through conversion and baptism.¹⁶ The concept of *kynde* as I have explored it in this book

¹⁴ See, for example, Russell, "The Salvation of the Heathen"; Adams, "Piers's Pardon and Langland's Semi-Pelagianism," *Traditio* 39 (1983): pp. 367–418; Gradon, "*Trajanus Redivivus*"; and Grady, "*Piers Plowman*, St. Erkenwald, and the Rule of Exceptional Salvations."

¹⁵ Watson, "Visions of Inclusion," p. 169.

¹⁶ In B.9, Wit reveals Kynde as the creator of the castle *Caro* and, moreover, "creatour of alle kynnes beestes,/ Fader and formour, þe first of alle þynges" (B.9.26–7). See my discussion of this figure's association with God the creator in Chapter 2.

helps us make sense of the poem's seemingly contradictory evaluations of non-Christians. The poem's universalism springs from its vision of nature as providentially ordered, but hope for universal salvation is only one expression of the desire to incorporate non-Christians. Anima's description of conversion as a kind of spiritual charity explores an alternative and *active* expression of the poem's universalist ethic, a program of inclusion through evangelism that is likewise predicated on the demands of *kynde*, but with the crucial distinction that Anima's vision of inclusion stipulates non-Christian conformity as a condition of their full incorporation.

Finally for Langland the ethical Christian must do more than hope that God will save worthy non-Christians, like the exemplary figure Trajan, through special dispensation; instead, Anima insists, the ethics of *kynde* demands efforts to convert contemporary non-Christians.¹⁷ The evangelical mission, which Anima describes as abandoned of late, represents not only the non-Christian's best hope for salvation, but also an ethical imperative for Christians themselves. Anima's exhortations to conversion in B.15 thus reveal a concern for the fulfillment of Christian obligation above their nominal regard for non-Christian salvation. The ethical demands of *kynde* urge Christians to reach out to their non-Christian brothers and sisters and also threaten a heavy penalty for failing to do so. To this extent, then, the question of the fate of non-Christians in *Piers Plowman* is less interested in ascertaining a theological basis for the salvation of non-Christian souls than in determining the ethical requirements Christians must fulfill in order to save their own souls.

"LIFLODE YNO3": NATURE'S PLENTY AND SHARING FAITH

Anima's discussion of the need for evangelism develops from the dialectic of the poem's two distinct but interdependent visions of nature, one depicting nature's abundant sufficiency, and the other insisting on its deficiency. Although these evaluations of nature appear to be in conflict, their coexistence in the poem indicates a fundamental characteristic of

¹⁷ Grady argues that Langland articulates an ethical duty to honor the pagan past by keeping worthy figures such as Trajan in the cultural memory: "If poetry is the key to remembrance, remembrance through poetry is the key to the salvation of the heathen" (*Piers Plowman, St. Erkenwald, and the Rule of Exceptional Salvations*, pp. 85–6). My argument adapts Grady's assessment of Langland's ethical concerns by considering the poem's treatment of living non-Christians as well as those of the past.

Langland's definition of charity and provides a basis for reconciling Anima's calls for conversion with the poem's universalist outlook elsewhere.

As we have seen in previous chapters of this study, Langland often presents the natural world as a site of abundance, carefully ordained by God for the sustenance of humankind. In addition to the fullness of its material provisions, the realm of nature also evinces a moral order expressed through images of harmony and symmetry.¹⁸ A key example of the poem's confident assessment of nature occurs in B.14 when Patience promises Haukyn he will provide sustenance for "[a]lle þat lyueþ and lokeþ" (B.14.32). "We sholde noȝt be to bisy abouten oure liflode," Patience counsels, reiterating Piers's earlier speech in B.7 and similarly citing the Sermon on the Mount as evidence of divine providence: "*Ne solliciti sitis . . . Volucres celi Deus pascit . . . Pacientes vincunt . . .*" (B.14.34–a).¹⁹ Patience attests further that God gives nothing life without at the same time creating a means for its livelihood:

For lent neuere was þere lif but liflode were shapen,
 Wherof or wherfore and wherby to libbe.
 First þe wilde worm vnder weet erþe,
 Fissh to lyue in þe flood, and in þe fir þe criket,
 The corlew by kynde of þe eyr, moost clenest flessch of briddes,
 And bestes by gras and by greyn and by grene rootes,
 In menyng þat alle men myȝte þe same
 Lyue þoruȝ leel bileue and loue. (B.14.40–7)

An instance of Langland's tendency to overlap physical and spiritual forms of nourishment, Patience's gloss offers a promise of God's provision for human spiritual needs in answer to Haukyn's excessive concern with physical sustenance. The spiritual substance of "leel bileue and loue" is a form of "lifelode" that paradoxically generates the means of bodily nourishment, and Patience's description of the natural abundance and order of creation reveals how intimately physical and spiritual goods are connected

¹⁸ The narrator memorably witnesses this order when in B.11 Kynde places him atop the "mountaigne þat Myddelerþe hizte" (B.11.323). Human behavior interrupts the symmetry of Kynde's creation. See my discussion of this episode in Chapter 3.

¹⁹ Patience's speech has been the subject of much debate in Langland scholarship. One view, espoused by critics including Clopper, "*Songes of Rechelesnesse*," Pearsall, "Poverty and Poor People," and Anna Baldwin, "Patient Politics in *Piers Plowman*," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 15 (2001): pp. 99–108, recognizes Patience as an ideal figure whose counsel Langland presents as a genuine social and spiritual remedy. But others, including Aers, *Signifying Signs*, pp. 99–156, and Watson, "*Piers Plowman*, Pastoral Theology, and Spiritual Perfectionism: Hawkyn's Cloak and Patience's *Pater noster*," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 21 (2007): pp. 83–118, argue that Langland rejects Patience's calls for renunciation as both impractical and uncondusive to the practice of charity.

in the poem's ethical program.²⁰ If human beings lived according to measure, Patience suggests, there would never be any lack among Christian creatures—for it is avarice, a spiritual failure whereby human beings consume goods out of proportion to their needs, that overturns the natural order God has established for the perfect nourishment of all things through the balanced circulation of goods.

One might observe at this point that Langland's assertion of divine providence in Patience's speech and elsewhere, powerfully demonstrated by the order and sufficiency of nature, reinforces the intimations of universal salvation that arise at several points throughout the poem. The attitude that Patience promotes with the credo "*Ne solliciti sitis*" encourages an absolute faith that God will provide for human needs, both physical and spiritual. Such trust in God's providence might by extension suggest that human beings can be confident in the eventual salvation of all humanity. In B.12, Imaginatif's speculations about the salvific value of pagan or natural wisdom acknowledge "an hope hangynge perinne" that God may extend his mercy broadly to those who lived according to the best law they knew (B.12.289). Imaginatif's hopeful discourse is also set within a larger context in which he praises Christian learning and memorably illustrates the advantages of Christian knowledge with the example of two men thrown into the Thames. Equally strong and "boþe naked as a nedle," the men are alike in all respects save that one can swim while the other remains "lewed of þat labour" (B.12.161, 163). Imaginatif poses this question to the dreamer:

Which trowestow of þo two in Thamese is in moost drede—
He þat neuere ne dyued ne noȝt kan of swymmyng,
Or þe swymmere þat is saaf by so hymself like,
Ther his felawe flet forþ as þe flood likeþ,
And is in drede to drenche, þat neuere dide swymme? (B.12.164–8)

Imaginatif here specifically speaks to the advantages of learning in general, but this illustration is equally apposite to the fate of non-Christian souls, if we understand the protagonists of Imaginatif's example as a Christian, whose knowledge of Christ enables him to "swim," and a non-Christian, whose ignorance threatens to weigh him down. In either case, the man who lacks knowledge *may* be able to reach the shores of salvation, yet the implication is clear: "he þat knoweþ clergie kan sonner arise/ Out of synne and be saaf" (B.12.171–2). Although this interchange is by no means the final word in the poem's debate about the value of learning, Imaginatif's

²⁰ Mann, "Eating and Drinking," explores the complicated interrelation between real and spiritual food in the poem.

example teaches that knowledge is a safer bet when salvation is at stake, and it is the uncertainty of this situation, powerfully conveyed by the image of the two men cast into the Thames, that underlies the poem's later advocacy of conversion.

Patience's declaration that his sack contains "liflode ynoȝ" echoes Imaginatif's earlier hopefulness about God's wide-ranging regard for individual truth and the generous reward of salvation that would follow (B.14.39); yet just as Imaginatif tempers his speculation with the example of the two men cast into the Thames, Patience concludes his universalist promise in B.14 with a qualifying clause: "if oure bileue be trewe" (B.14.39). That is, belief is "trewe," and therefore there is "ynoȝ" for all—in both physical and spiritual terms—when belief is specifically Christian, rather than simply steadfast (B.14.39). The provision of nature itself is not finally "ynoȝ" to guarantee universal salvation, though it underlies Langland's evident attraction to it. Where belief is lacking, sustenance, too, dwindles, just as the strong man who cannot swim will likely sink against the current of the Thames.

This brings us to the poem's alternative vision of nature. Any study of *kynde* must finally confront this apparent inconsistency: while Langland extols the sufficiency of nature and presents its operations as a model for human behavior, he alternately proclaims its inadequacy, especially in regard to spiritual concerns. Throughout this book I have been in conversation with Nicolette Zeeman's insightful solution to this problem in her study of *kynde* as a "site of lack" in *Piers Plowman*, a condition involving deficiency in relation to both material and spiritual goods, encompassing the experiences of "the poor, the lay, the pagan, the *recheles* and the sinful," as well as Christ himself when he takes human "kynde" by his Incarnation.²¹ In Zeeman's reading, natural lack initiates a form of redemptive suffering for those who respond with "patient endurance . . . which may bring the most extreme spiritual rewards."²² "Doing well" may involve moving beyond secure modes of action, institutions and formulations," Zeeman writes. "It may involve the absolute risk of putting all in the hands of God."²³ Zeeman's analysis of *kynde* thus accords with the poem's various affirmations of hopes for a broadly inclusive salvation, for the natural experience of lack contains also the promise of providential

²¹ Zeeman, "Condition of Kynde," pp. 3, 16. See also Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, which I discuss in this book's Introduction and Chapter 3. The book-length study expands her earlier analysis in slightly different terms but further reveals Langland's *kynde* as "a place of 'having' and 'not having'" (p. 157).

²² Zeeman, "Condition of Kynde," p. 3.

²³ Zeeman, "Condition of Kynde," p. 7.

deliverance, of divine mercy in response to human need.²⁴ While similarly acknowledging the "lack" or gaps that characterize Langland's notion of nature, I seek to demonstrate the presence in the poem of an alternative to radical patience, to what Zeeman refers to as "the absolute risk of putting all in the hands of God."²⁵ *Piers Plowman* also challenges its audience, and the clergy in particular, to put their own hands to work in remedying nature's deficiencies through acts of charity. In other words, while lack and suffering are without question essential characteristics of Langland's conception of *kynde*, the poem also promotes the parallel claim that God has built into *kynde* the human role in regulating and refining what nature provides. We should consider then not only the poem's recommendation to those who experience lack—that they suffer patiently, and thereby kindle the "recuperative potential of natural experience"²⁶—but also its address to those in a position to remedy or alleviate the suffering of others. When Patience asserts God's absolute provision for humankind's needs, he indicates that God has built into nature the means of securing *both* physical and spiritual necessities, but, in each case, this sufficiency can be achieved only through virtuous human action, an essential element in God's provision for the balanced operation of the created world. This call-to-action, an empowered view of human capacity to act as partners with God in the work of creation, is finally the ground on which Langland's humanistic assessment of nature rests.

Replacing Anima in a passage unique to the C-text, *Liberum Arbitrium* delivers the poem's sharpest indictment of *kynde* deficiency but in doing so also highlights the place for redressive human action. In answer to the narrator's question as to whether Saracens practice charity, *Liberum Arbitrium* affirms that they indeed have a "manere charite" (C.17.151) that arises from the instinctive love that creatures bear toward their creator:

Hit is kyndly thyng, creature his creatour to honoure,
For þer is no man þat mynde hath þat ne meketh hym and bysecheth
To þat Lord þat hym lyf lente and lyflode hym sente. (C.17.153–5)

Like the Samaritan, *Liberum Arbitrium* suggests that creator and creature are bound together by love in the very act of creation. But *Liberum Arbitrium* qualifies his acceptance of the efficacy of this natural virtue. Although he allows that non-Christians *may* practice charity through an

²⁴ Zeeman, "The Condition of Kynde," pp. 6, 28–30. See also Mann, "Eating and Drinking," pp. 39–43 and "Nature of Need," especially pp. 26–8, who argues that Langland represents salvation as the result of *divine* need.

²⁵ Zeeman, "The Condition of Kynde," p. 7.

²⁶ Zeeman, "The Condition of Kynde," p. 25.

instinctive, “kyndly” love of their creator, many who lack knowledge of Christ instead misdirect their love toward “a mene,” specifically, a false mediator like Mahommed:

And when kynde hath his cours and no contrarie fyndeth,
 Thenne is lawe ylefte and leute vnknowe.
Beaute sanz bounte, blessed was hit neuere,
 Ne kynde *sanz cortesie* in no contreye is preysed. (C.17.163–4)

Although the poem broadly commends the “lawe of kynde” elsewhere, here Langland exposes its limitations in order to urge Christians to convert those who have *only* this law. As in the previous example of Imaginatif’s account of the two men cast into the Thames, Liberum Arbitrium raises serious questions about the sufficiency of nature as a guide to salvation even as the poem’s various speakers extol the generosity and care with which God has ordained creation and often uphold the natural world as a model for human behavior. In what follows, I suggest that this ambivalence toward nature can be resolved by recognizing the crucial role that Langland assigns to Christians in general and the clergy in particular as administrators of “Cristes goodes” (B.15.103). If natural instinct and the truths intelligible through natural reason cannot be relied on to bring humankind to salvation, the operation of the world of nature and the requirements of *kynde* can still provide a model for a system of ethics capable of filling in the gaps that render nature deficient on its own.

As I discussed in Chapter 4, the kinship bond that moves Christ to extend his mercy in B.18 serves more broadly as the basis for Christian charity in *Piers Plowman*.²⁷ Asserting that all human beings are Christ’s “breþeren,” for example, Trajan declares the essential demands of this *kynde* relation:

Forþi loue we as leue children shal, and ech man lauþe vp ooþer,
 And of þat ech man may forbere, amende þere it nedep,
 And euery man helpe ooþer—for hennes shul we alle:
Alter alterius onera portate. (B.11.208–10a)

But the obligations of *kynde* do not concern only fellow Christians. During the narrator’s dispute with Scripture over whether baptism is sufficient to guarantee salvation, Scripture tells the narrator that, in addition to being baptized, Christians must also live according to the law of Christ: “That is, loue þi Lord God leuest aboue alle,/ And after, alle Cristene creatures in

²⁷ On kinship and ethics in *Piers Plowman*, see, for example, White, *Nature and Salvation*, pp. 89–111; Galloway, “The Making of a Social Ethic,” especially his discussion of *Piers Plowman*, pp. 378–82; and Tavormina, *Kindly Similitude*.

commune, ech man ooper" (B.10.355–6). Furthermore, Scripture continues, no man may go to heaven who has a coat and sees beggars go naked, or delights in "wyn and wildefowel" and knows of some person in need (B.10.361). Crucially, Scripture extends this exhortation of love to include even the non-Christian:

For euery Cristene creature sholde be kynde til ooper,
And siþen heþen to helpe in hope of amendement.
God hoteþ boþe heize and lowe þat no man hurte ooper,
And seiþ, "Slee noȝt þat semlable is to myn owene liknesse." (B.10.362–5)

According to Scripture, Christians should reach out to the "heþen" to bring about their conversion or "amendment." Langland here affirms non-Christian kinship with Christ: non-Christians are also made in God's "owene liknesse" and this fundamental similitude renders them potential members of the Christian community. This essential kinship might be enough to warrant the eventual salvation of all humanity, as Christ's speech in B.18 suggests, and so serve to assuage the conscientious Christian's anxiety about non-Christian salvation; yet, on the other hand, these lines hint at a certain danger to the Christian's own soul. The fact of kinship with non-Christians entails the inescapable demands of *kynde*, chief among them being the obligation of those who have to share with those who have not. Christians who neglect the "heþen to helpe," the poem suggests, fail to perform an essential duty of *kynde* and, in effect, "hurte" and perhaps even "slee" their non-Christian kin by abandoning them to damnation.

Despite the poem's intermittent speculation about the value of natural understanding, knowledge of Christ is for Langland a necessary supplement to human beings' natural abilities, and therefore the distribution of such knowledge is an ethical imperative, as essential an activity as the distribution of the physical requirements of food, drink, and clothing. Canon law held that private ownership of property is legitimate only where there is no need, since all things were created by God and thus properly belong only to God himself. The *Decretum* states: "Proprium nemo dicat, quod est commune, plus quam sufficeret sumptum et uiolenter obtentum est" [No one may call his own what is common, of which, if man takes more than he needs, it is obtained by violence].²⁸ The

²⁸ *Decretum*, Dist. 47 C.8. All quotations from canon law refer to the *Corpus iuris canonici*, 2 vols, ed. Emil Ludwig Richter, with revisions by Emil Friedberg (Leipzig, 1879; repr. Graz, 1959). On the medieval church's position on property ownership, see Brian Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law: A Sketch of Canonical Theory and Its Application in England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959), pp. 22–44, whose translation of the *Decretum* I cite above.

accumulation of a surplus was held to be especially grievous, whether the excess be consumed or merely possessed out of moderation, and a man who has enough to sustain himself and his family, according to his particular station, is obligated to share his private wealth with the poor. Langland extends these principles of canon law to forms of spiritual sustenance as well as material goods, a point that Trajan exemplifies in directing every individual to “amende þere it nedep,” distributing both “catel” and “konnyng” to those who lack it (B.11.209, 211).

According to the poem’s logic of *kynde*, Christians, and especially the learned clergy, may be said to hoard “Cristes goodes,” the invaluable wealth of the Christian faith that ought to be distributed to non-Christians in their need (B.15.103). Evangelization, the means of sharing the surplus of Christian knowledge with the “spiritually needy,” is the other side of the universalist coin for those who view the shared nature of humanity as a bond of *kynde* requiring diligent care for one’s kin. As Christ justifies merciful judgment with reference to his “kynde” (“my kynde it askep,” B.18.376), Langland suggests that it is similarly human “kynde” that justifies, indeed demands, efforts to convert non-Christians. Only by considering the poem’s attention to conversion alongside its universalism, indeed, as an expression of its universalist ethic, can we approach an adequate understanding of Langland’s vision of salvation.²⁹

THE ROLE OF THE CLERGY

Charity and the need for clerical teaching, particularly of lessons intended to result in conversion, are the two major concerns to which B.15 returns again and again: in fact, Anima defines teaching and evangelization as forms of charity analogous to almsgiving.³⁰ Although Anima addresses a wide audience in this passus, now exhorting bishops, now wealthy landowners, now all Christians in general, the force of his argument weighs most heavily upon the clerical estate.³¹ As the “roote” of society, the clergy

²⁹ Steiner, “Radical Historiography,” argues that *Piers Plowman*’s coordination of universalism, translation, and conversion in B.15 are shaped by the influence of Higden’s *Polychronicon*, a “supra-history” or “master genre” that aspires to narrative totality (pp. 175, 191–211).

³⁰ In “Mahomet and the Conversion of the Heathen,” pp. 1–2, Paull argues that Langland presents the conversion of non-Christians as a key step toward the unification of the Church in charity, though he focuses primarily on Langland’s sources for the story of Mohammed and not on the rationale for conversion or the means by which it is to be achieved.

³¹ See, for example, Anima’s addresses to “ye riche” at B.15.335; “ye clerkes” and “ye bisshopes” at B.15.550, 553; and “alle cristene” at B.15.343. On B.15 as an indictment of

bears responsibility for distributing life-giving sustenance to the whole community. For "þer þe roote is roten," Anima observes, "shal neuere flour ne fruyt, ne fair leef be grene" (B.15.101–2). The remainder of this chapter focuses on the fundamental role of the clergy as distributors of belief, an obligation that does not expire at the boundaries of the Christian community; rather, Anima defines the clerical ministry in the broadest of terms, extending the responsibility for distributing belief through teaching even to those who are outside the Christian community.

In arguing that charity depends on the instruction of "prechours and techers," Anima distinguishes two interrelated forms of instruction: the clerical model of "lele libbynge," that is, teaching by example, as well as the dissemination of "Goddes lawe" through sermons and formal pedagogy (B.15.95, 93). Anima's invocation of Antony, Egidius, and the hermit Paul, who were sustained by divine "foweles" (B.15.278), serves a dual purpose by presenting to contemporary clergy a model of "lele libbynge" and also exemplifying for them the manner in which God sends sustenance to his creatures through intermediary channels. Anima exhorts the clergy to be satisfied with having "ynoȝ" rather than seeking to accumulate a surplus (B.15.317) and directs them to adopt simple lifestyles patterned after the desert saints who lived "in wildernesse among wilde beestes" and received sustenance from divine birds: "God sente hem foode by foweles" (B.15.273, 305). Anima assures the clergy that if they will follow the examples of Antony and Egidius, Benedict and Bernard, and "lyue by litel," they will successfully demonstrate the basis of belief and inspire "lewed men" to "amenden hem . . . for [their] ensamples" (B.15.422, 108–9).³² The clergy might then fulfill their obligation to be channels and distributors of divine sustenance, analogous at once to the divine birds that fed the desert fathers and to the root from which "holynesse and honeste . . . spredeþ" (B.15.92).

Immediately following his exposition of the clergy's "radical" role in the analogy of the tree, Anima recalls Trajan's insistence that Christians be "noȝt vnkynde of oure catel, ne of oure konnyng neiper" when he charges the clergy to be "kynde as bifel for clerkes and curteise of Cristes goodes" (B.11.211, B.15.104). We should note here how the double significance

the clergy for failing to practice charity, see Robertson and Huppé, *Piers Plowman* and *Scriptural Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951), pp. 177–91; Frank, *Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation*, pp. 81–3; Simpson, *Piers Plowman: An Introduction to the B-Text*, pp. 167–86; and Warner, "Becket and the Hopping Bishops," whose argument I discuss below.

³² As Steiner observes, "passus 15 is a virtual treatise on the subject" of historical exemplarity, according to which view "our forefathers acted in the past, and we read and imitate their actions in the present" ("Radical Historiography", p. 193).

of the term “Cristes goodes” mandates the distribution of both physical and spiritual sustenance. Anima reiterates this twofold charge in reminding prelates of their particular obligation to divide out “Cristes patrimonye to þe poore parcelmele” (B.15.246). The semantic range of the term “Cristes patrimonye” comprises both the monetary endowment of the Church as well as the “spiritual legacy”—that is, sacramental grace and, ultimately, salvation itself—which Christ confers upon the Church.³³ In debates over the status of church property, canon law considered the wealth and holdings of the Church, like other property, ultimately to belong to God. But in reminding the Church of its role as protector of the needy, canon law often designated church property as “the patrimony of the poor.”³⁴ Near the end of B.15, in a special indictment of episcopal failure, Anima declares that “[e]uery bisshop þat bereþ cros” ought to pass through his province delivering the “goostly foode” of Trinitarian doctrine in addition to the more immediately satisfying physical sustenance required by “nedy folk”: for “no man sholde be bisshop but if he hadde boþe/ Bodily foode and goostly foode to gyue þere it nedede” (B.15.569–75). Thus when Anima asserts the necessity of sharing out “Cristes goodes” and “Cristes patrimonye,” he refers immediately to the physical provisions that “þe poore” lack (B.15.246). But both terms also indicate the knowledge, or “konnyng,” as Trajan puts it, that is the special charge of the Church, the spiritual food that strengthens the social body and enables it to care for itself, leading to salvation of the community and of the individual soul.

In accord with Scripture’s mandate discussed above—that Christians are obligated “hepen to helpe in hope of amendement” (B.10.363)—B.15 further demands that the Church’s distribution of the “spiritual legacy” of Christ should extend beyond its usual responsibility for education and administration of the sacraments within the Christian community. Anima lays down a challenge for the clergy to bring belief to non-Christians as well, perhaps most pointedly in his address to the titular bishops, “swiche þat of Surrye bereþ þe name”—that is, of places such as “Bethleem” and “Babiloigne,” “Nazareþ,” “Nynyue,” “Neptalym and Damaske”—but prefer to “huppe aboute in Engeland,” and neglect their pastoral duties in remote Eastern lands (B.15.527, 509, 493, 528).³⁵ Evoking the early

³³ MED, s.v. “patrimoine,” noun, 1.b.: “the endowments and properties belonging to the Church; also the spiritual legacy of Christ to the Church.”

³⁴ Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law*, p. 40. Alternatively, church wealth was considered the property of the Christian community as a whole, held in common for the benefit of all, especially those who are in need. See Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law*, pp. 40–4, and Scott, *Piers Plowman and the Poor*, pp. 33–4.

³⁵ On the phenomenon of these “absentee” bishops, see Skeat’s *The Vision of William*, 2: pp. 231–2, and R.N. Swanson, *Church and Society in Late Medieval England* (New York:

Christian martyrs who died professing their faith, Anima urges contemporary bishops to abandon their "couetise" and, by imitating the courage of the martyrs, dedicate themselves to the education of their flocks: "Tellen hem and techen hem on þe Trinite to bileue" (B.15.542, 571). Teaching and conversion are thus powerfully figured in B.15 as an alternative strategy to reliance on the hope for universal or exceptional salvation and, indeed, as a clerical mandate—part of being "kynde as bifel for clerkes" (B.15.104).

Anima elaborates the principles of clerical obligation in B.15 through a densely interrelated series of exempla, each aimed to highlight the clerical power to persuade through pedagogical instruction and personal example. Most important for our understanding of Anima's instructions to the clergy with regard to their evangelical duty, the paired conversion narratives of Mohammed and Augustine of Canterbury serve to admonish and to rally the contemporary English clergy with illustrations from the Christian past.³⁶ Alluding to Mohammed's use of a trained bird to lead the people of Syria into "mysbileue," Anima describes how greedy "Englisshe clerkes" now feed a "coluere" called Covetise and come dangerously close to repeating Mohammed's misdeed (B.15.409, 414).³⁷ The C-text amplifies this comparison, explicitly describing the Holy Spirit, and the evangelical work it facilitates, as the antidote to Mohammed and his trained bird:

And seth Oure Saucour soffrede such a fals Cristene
Disceue so the Sarrasyns, sothlyche me thynketh,
Holy men, as Y hope, thorw helpe of the Holy Goste
Sholden conuerte hem to Crist, and Cristendoem to take. (C.17.183–6)

Liberum Arbitrium here reminds the Christian clergy that they have at their service an intercessory truly sent by God. In order that they might correct Mohammed's deception rather than repeat it, he urges that the

Blackwell, 1989), pp. 8–10. Warner has elucidated this passage in describing Anima's rhetorical association of the titular bishops with the friars, two classes of clergy that have failed to live up to their evangelical charge. Warner further explores Anima's designation of Thomas Becket as a "bright mirror" to the "hopping bishops," confirming the saint's unexpected connection to evangelism through an analysis of Becker's "sermonic, legendary and liturgical associations," a tradition which portrays his martyrdom as a fate that all dutiful prelates should embrace ("Becket and the Hopping Bishops," pp. 110–11).

³⁶ Steiner, "Radical Historiography," reaches a more pessimistic conclusion about Anima's use of the ecclesiastical past to rally contemporary clergy: "Langland's historiography banishes clerical exemplarity to the dark recesses of the Christian—and English—past. The passus as a whole is informed by a sense of ecclesiastical history at once chronologically removed and deliberately anachronistic, suggesting that history offers both a necessary measure of, and *impossible conditions* for, the present clergy" (p. 200).

³⁷ On Wyclif's designation of sinful Christian clergy as followers of Mohammed, see Paull, "Mahomet and the Conversion of the Heathen," pp. 5–6.

Christian clergy “crie to Crist a wolde *his* coluer sende,/ The whiche is þe hy Holy Gost þat out of heuene descendet” (C.17.246–7, emphasis added). Here at the intersection of the evangelical imperative and a universalizing vision, Liberum Arbitrium defines the evangelical mission initiated by the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as the means to achieve a truly universal salvation for “alle maner men þat on this molde libbeth” (C.17.249). The active effort of the clergy to convert non-Christians is crucial to the fulfillment of this promise of inclusive salvation, and Langland reinforces the necessity of clerical action with the ensuing account of Augustine’s mission among the pagan Anglo-Saxons. In B, Anima evokes the English past as precedent for a commitment to evangelism that his contemporary clerical audience might follow. With a brief etymology of the term “heþen,” Anima suggests that the Anglo-Saxons’ “heþen” souls offered Augustine a fertile ground for tilling the Gospel, with the implication that, in time, the barren “marche” or “wild-ernesne” in which they live might be “fourmed” and made fruitful through cultivation, its “rude and vnresonable” beasts domesticated by clerical instruction (B.15.448, 445, 459–60).³⁸

The passus in fact culminates with a demonstration of the method that clergy faithful to the evangelical imperative might employ in distributing the wealth of “Cristes goodes.” In a series of lines that models the process of conversion in explicitly pedagogical terms, Langland deploys the Latin language to signal a critical difference between Christians and non-Christians. In contrast to the accessibility of the vernacular, Latin represents an exclusive realm of spiritual knowledge, an episteme into which non-Christians must be “fourmed” by an education that shapes and assimilates them (B.15.450). Anima maintains the fundamental kinship between Christians and “þe Sarzens and also þe Iewes” for, as fellow monotheists, they already “konne” the first clause of the Christian creed, recognizing that the one all-powerful God is the common Father to all:

³⁸ As Barney has shown, Langland here taps into a long tradition of depicting the activity of preaching in agricultural terms, especially as cultivation of the field of the soul. In the parable of the sower, Mark and Luke describe God’s word as a seed, and Paul specifically compares the dissemination of the Gospel by missionaries to the sowing of seeds. See Barney, “Plowshare of the Tongue,” pp. 268–79. David Aers, too, discusses Langland’s use of agricultural imagery in *“Piers Plowman” and Christian Allegory* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1975), pp. 109–31. Aers describes how Langland initially strips agricultural imagery of its “habitually pious referents” at early stages in the poem in order to demonstrate how the historical acts of Christ depicted in the later passūs release the allegorical potential of plowing and related imagery (p. 113). Aers discusses Anima’s comparison of non-Christians to an uncultivated field, but notes that the agricultural image here “comes in a piece of teaching about baptism and is again not developed” since “the dynamic which shows the creation of the means for cultivation has not yet been fully achieved and grasped in the vision” (p. 125).

"*Credo in Deum patrem omnipotentem*" (B.15.606–7). Now he urges the Christian clergy to expand the basic knowledge of non-Christians and bring them ever more firmly into the Christian family, teaching them the remaining clauses of the faith step by step—just as they must dispense Christ's patrimony to the poor "parcelmele" (B.15.246):

Prelates of Cristene prouinces sholde preue, if þei myzte,
Lere hem litlum and litlum *Et in Jesum Christum filium*,
Til þei kouþe speke and spelle *Et in Spiritum sanctum*,
And rendren it and recorden it wiþ *remissionem peccatorum*,
Carnis resurreccionem et vitam eternam. Amen. (B.15.609–12)

Employing verbs such as "speke," "spelle," "rendren," and "recorden," this passage presents conversion as a grammar school exercise in translation; indeed, such an education is understood to move or translate the pupil from the fringes of the Christian community to a place securely within its protective domain, leading to salvation, "*vitam eternam*" (B.15.612).³⁹ Initiation into the Christian community is thus figured in terms of learning proficiency in a language, a process modeled by the macaronic lines above.

Contrary to what Watson's observations about the relationship between universal salvation and the vernacular might predict, the language through which non-Christians may reach salvation is not English, or another vernacular, but Latin. I do not mean to suggest that we interpret Langland's use of Latin here as an indication of any hostility toward using the vernacular in theological matters. Instead, since the poem promotes conversion here, not the broadly inclusive hope of universal salvation, it follows that Latin emerges as a steadfast symbol of the universal Church and of the Christian faith itself, thus illustrating the notion that Christianity is a "foreign language" that non-Christians must be taught. With the Latin phrases fastened to the ends of English lines, this passage suggests that the vernacular provides a means to move toward acquisition of the higher truths of the Christian faith embodied in Latin. At this meeting point of the poem's universalist ethic and its evangelical imperative, Langland endorses translation; but rather than boldly rendering Latin ideas into the vernacular, as the poet does elsewhere, here he insists on the

³⁹ Harvey Hames's study of Ramon Llull's efforts to create a "common tongue" as a tool for exchange between Christians and non-Christians, with the explicit aim of converting the latter, provides an intriguing comparison to Langland's concern with language barriers and method of translation here. See Hames, "The Language of Conversion: Ramon Llull's Art as a Vernacular" in *The Vulgar Tongue: Medieval and Postmedieval Vernacularity*, ed. Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), pp. 43–56.

essential distinction of the Latin language and its special custody of salvific knowledge, which ought to be mediated through clerical culture. In setting forth the lines of the Apostles' Creed in Latin, without offering any translation or gloss, Langland asserts an essential connection between these tenets of the Christian faith and the Latinate culture that preserves and, ideally, distributes them. Langland stops short of affirming that English, or another vernacular, might convey the basis of the Christian faith as readily as Latin does; however, these bilingual lines constitute an appeal for active measures that would translate a broader audience into the faith embodied in Latin. The untranslated Latin phrases remain a realm apart, inaccessible to the untutored. They demand translation, but do not readily offer it. In other words, against the hopes of the broadest universal visions, the promise of Christian faith, "*vitam eternam*," does not extend its meaning to non-Christians, but they themselves must be translated, or "fourmed," to comply with its rigors, a demand that Langland conveys through the uncompromising distinction of the Latin phrases that complete these vernacular lines.

The "translation exercise" that concludes the passus thus reminds the clergy of its crucial role as mediators of Latinate culture, and the salvific knowledge preserved therein, to a largely "illiterate" laity—and here illiteracy describes the inability to comprehend Latin as well as the spiritual illiteracy of non-Christians. The Latin lines enact a symbolic barrier between non-Christians and the way to salvation, an obstacle that theories of universal salvation finally disregard as less important than the essential bond of kinship with the Creator. But, as I have argued above, even in its hopefulness the poem remains ambivalent about the ultimate efficacy of the natural bond of kinship alone. Instead the poem seeks a more intimate union, the supernatural bond of faith conferred through baptism, as exemplified by Anima's account of Augustine's conversion of the Anglo-Saxons:

Al was hepynesse som tyme in Engelond and Walis,
 Til Gregory garte clerkes to go here and preche.
 Austyn at Canterbury cristnede þe kyng þere,
 And þoruþ miracles, as men mow rede, al þat marche he tornede
 To Crist and to Cristendom, and cros to honoure,
 And follede folk faste, and þe feiþ tauzte . . .
 And fourmed hem what fullynge and feiþ was to mene. (B.15.442–7, 450)

Finally, the wilderness of the pagans, figured by the "heep," stands parallel to the wilderness of Antony and Egidius that Anima evokes early in the passus: through Gregory's commission of Augustine, God again sends sustenance into the wilderness on the wings of his messengers, not divine birds, but the clergy of Christendom whose dissemination of the Gospel

and administration of the sacraments mediate God's grace to the world. Thus, the "foweles" that fed the desert fathers are redeployed as "fullers" who tame by instructing and, finally, save through baptism, bringing non-Christians into the fullness of what "feip was to mene" (B.15.450).

The urgency of adding grace to nature emerges as the salient lesson of Anima's chain of exempla in B.15. Although Anima devalues the condition of nature through his various analogies, he is confident in the ability of human action to prepare nature for the reception of grace: the empty field can be made fruitful through cultivation. As Anima's comparison of the pagan Anglo-Saxon to a newborn baby reveals, the poem imagines the state of nature as essentially inadequate, naked and "helples to þe soule" without the saving mantle of faith (B.15.457). But when Augustine "follede folk faste," his mission among the Anglo-Saxons in effect "fills up" what their nature was lacking (B.15.447). The supernatural grace imparted by baptism transforms the bareness of nature, fulfilling it by activating its fruitful potential. Here is the reconciliation of the two competing visions of nature presented in the poem, one lauding its order and sufficiency, the other insisting on its limited and unfinished status. Langland asserts the role of human, and especially clerical, action as part of God's provision of nature: human action "finishes" nature, fulfilling its potential through acts of interpretation and charity.

We are perhaps most comfortable with this view as it applies to material goods: where nature fails to provide enough for all, acts of charity "fill in the gaps," as it were, redistributing the essential physical provisions to those in need. But in considering the poem's assertion of nature's deficiency in spiritual matters, we confront a mindset to which our own notion of being *kynde* may blind us. However much the poem strives toward a universal vision, Anima's speech presents untutored human nature, the condition of human birth, as a liability, an impediment to spiritual potential, just as unsalted meat is "vnsauory" and raw cloth "noȝt comly to were" (B.15.433, 451). Anima instead urges that this "[r]ude" or undeveloped nature be "fourmed" by the guidance of Christian clerks like Augustine (B.15.450). Even as the rise of the vernacular promoted access and inclusivity in matters of salvation, Langland rallies the clergy with affirmation of their continuing importance as mediators of faith.

Epilogue

Kynde Courtesy

This book began by establishing Kynde as a successor to the Natura of twelfth-century humanist poetics. Kynde's literary history links the figure to a theory of allegorical reading that motivates Langland's resilient confidence in the natural order as an expression of its creator as well as in the human capacity not only to decipher that order but crucially to participate in the *ongoing* work of creation. I conclude this study by highlighting Langland's concept of *cortesie*, a term that expresses the salvific work that *kynde* both demands and enables. *Cortesie*, in effect, describes Langland's sense of the relationship between nature and grace and names the human role in bridging those two realms.

As we saw in Chapter 5, in the C-text Liberum Arbitrium mounts a powerful challenge to the claims of natural capacity when he urges the clergy to confront *kynde* with its "contrarie," to fulfill the needy order of nature with the revelation of God's grace. Indeed, Liberum Arbitrium's terms establish grace as the complement and fulfillment of nature, if not quite its opposite: "*Beaute sanz bounte*, blessed was hit neuere," Liberum Arbitrium declares. "Ne kynde sanz *cortesie* in no contreye is preysed" (C.17.163–4). The first line of this couplet, as Pearsall observes, adapts a popular secular proverb to spiritual use.¹ Joining inner "goodness" or "virtue" to outer beauty, *bounte* perfects the attributes of the idealized courtly lady; moreover, in this secular context, the lady's *bounte* also represents the suitor's hope of success, taking on the additional meanings of "kindness," "generosity," and "mercy."² So while the immediate purpose of Liberum Arbitrium's adage is to point out the insufficiency of pagan belief, the association of *bounte* with mercy shifts our attention from

¹ Pearsall, *Piers Plowman*, p. 289, n. to line 163. For the history of the proverb, see B.J. Whiting, with the collaboration of H.W. Whiting, *Proverbs, Sentences and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly before 1500* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 152.

² See *MED* s.v. "bounte" (n.).

those under judgment to the one who judges, activating an awareness of divine largesse. The terms of the comparison, in other words, keep God's own bounty in view, lending hope to pagan salvation even as *Liberum Arbitrium* explicitly places it in doubt.³

The second line of *Liberum Arbitrium*'s couplet, which seems to be Langland's own improvisation on the proverbial model, likewise translates a secular concept to a spiritual context. *Cortesie*, along with its adjectival and adverbial forms, describes the refined manners of chivalry, the courtly ideal of virtue. Like *bounte*, it is associated with generosity, kindness, and grace.⁴ *Liberum Arbitrium*'s use of the term, then, seems designed to draw on its connotations of refinement and forbearance, a certain moderation of the ferocity of nature, such as we have seen displayed in the untrammelled assault of Hunger in B.6, or alluded to in Anima's comparison of non-Christians to "wilde beestes,/ Rude and vnresonable" (B.15.459–60). It is this brutal aspect of *kynde* that *Liberum Arbitrium* seeks to tame with *cortesie*.

As I have argued throughout this book, however, *kynde* is a divided concept in *Piers Plowman*. Indeed, *Liberum Arbitrium*'s formulation is troubled not only by the fact that *kynde* is predominantly—if not entirely—a positive concept in *Piers Plowman*, but also because one of the meanings of *cortesie* is kindness.⁵ If there can be a "*kynde sanz cortesie*," this does not mean that *kynde* can only be *sanz cortesie*. To the contrary, the poem demonstrates through numerous examples that *kynde* frequently is courteous, that *cortesie* is a capacity of *kynde*.

The term *cortesie* develops a rich association of meaning throughout the poem. It is alliteratively associated with *Kynde*, *Christ*, *clerks*, *knights*, *kings*, and most often, with *Conscience*. It contraries its alliterative opposite *unkynde*, further suggesting its alliance with *kyndenesse* (e.g. Sloth's confession that he is "*vnkynde ayeins . . . curteisie and kan nouȝt vnderstonden it*," B.5.431). Indeed, *cortesie* is often evoked in contrary-to-fact situations, suggesting that someone *should* be courteous but is not.

³ This dynamic recalls *Imaginatif*'s similar claim in C that God's mercy is so great that virtuous pagans may "hope" for a "*cortesye more þen couenant was*" (C.14.216). Like "*bounte*," "*cortesye*," as I discuss further below, is a sign of God's generosity *above* the "*couenant*," or strict terms of justice. Simpson, "Spirituality and Economics," discusses Langland's use of economic language to describe forms of spiritual merit, including reward beyond desert. See also Adams, "Mede and Mercede: The Evolution of the Economics of Grace in the *Piers Plowman* B and C Versions," in Edward D. Kennedy et al., *Medieval English Studies Presented to George Kane* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1988), pp. 217–32, and Smith, "The Labors of Reward: Mede, Mercede, and the Beginning of Salvation," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 8 (1994): pp. 127–54.

⁴ See *MED*, s.v. "*courtesie*" (n.), s.v. "*courteis*" (adj.), and s.v. "*courtesliche*" (adv.).

⁵ See *MED*, s.v. "*courtesie*" (n.), 1, 3.

There are only two cases in which courtesy is ascribed to diabolical figures, and in these instances it is a feigned courtesy, though nevertheless all too effective, as when it describes the behavior of the lawyers corrupted by Fals and Favel (C.2.167) and, later, when the friar Sir Penetrans Domos speaks courteously to Conscience and precipitates the fall of Unity (B.20.356).

But *cortesie*'s association with refinement, generosity, and forbearance typically bears positive spiritual connotations, and like other Middle English writers, Langland frequently uses the term to describe divine mercy.⁶ Together Kynde and Christ account for seven instances of the term and its forms in *Piers Plowman*. In the case of Kynde, Langland describes the act of creation and God's ongoing care for his creatures as examples of divine courtesy. In C, Reason warns Will that Kynde alone has knowledge of "þe bygynnge," for Kynde himself "contreuede hit furst of his corteysse wille" (C.14.159–60). Kynde's provision for creation is described in similar terms in B, when Will recalls his dream in the previous passus "[o]f Kynde and of his konnyng, / and how curteis he is to bestes" (B.13.15). Holy Church evokes divine "curteisie" in the poem's opening passus when she describes God's institution of the three common needs: "vesture," "mete," and "drynke" (B.1.20–5). Although the institution of need may on the surface seem onerous to human life—and so rather *discourteous*—in fact, Holy Church implies, God does his creatures a great kindness in setting limits on their needs ("[a]re non nedfulle but þo"), courteously establishing need as guide to proper consumption (B.1.21). Christ, likewise, is called courteous in his characteristic acts of merciful intercession. Imaginatif, for example, speaks of Christ's "curteisie" in defending the woman taken in adultery (B.12.77; C does not use courtesy in this context but similarly equates Christ's action with the "[l]awe of loue," C.14.38). The Samaritan describes Christ's "curteisie," or mercy, as a "warm flaumbe," fueled by acts of repentance and restitution, but, conversely, stifled by its contrary, "unkyndenesse" (B.17.245). Patience promises that "of his curteisie" Christ shall reward the rich who demonstrate compassion for the poor (B.14.147), and later in the poem Christ "curteisliche" responds to Thomas's desire for proof of his Resurrection (B.19.177). In each case, Langland associates *cortesie* with compassion and forbearance, the very same qualities that describe divine as well as human kindness in the poem.

Liberum Arbitrium's formulation of *cortesie* as a refinement of *kynde* maintains the orthodox distinctions between pagan and Christian belief,

⁶ See, for example, Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* (l. 246), as well as instances in *Patience* (l. 417) and *Pearl* (ll. 456–7, 480).

between justice and mercy, and between the orders of nature and grace, but it does not finally set them in opposition. Rather, he poses the two terms—*kynde* and *cortesie*—as a rightful, and righteous, pair. If *kynde* is the product of God's original *cortesie* in the act of creation, creaturely *cortesie*—Christ's, the clergy's, the individual conscience's—effects *kynde*'s fulfillment.

Indeed, the etymology of *cortesie*, which derives from the Old French *court*, meaning, simply, an enclosure, points us toward the poem's central image of the union of nature and grace in the human person. While *Piers Plowman* features numerous scenes in royal and bureaucratic courts, it also imagines a spiritual court, or court of virtue, located not in the heavens but in the human heart itself. In B.5 Piers teaches the wandering pilgrims the way to "a court as cler as þe sonne" (B.5.585). To get there they must traverse an allegorical landscape marked by features representing the Ten Commandments, which is to say they must obey the law of Moses; these laws, however, Piers has already joined to Christ's command to love God and neighbor, and so the enumerated commandments become an elaboration of Christ's synopsis of the law. At the end of this journey, Piers promises, the pilgrims will arrive at Truth's "court." But here, too, the law must be fulfilled: although the moat is made of Mercy and Grace is the gatekeeper, the court is buttressed by the demands of "bilef," penance, and almsgiving. By satisfying Grace's "man" Amends, the pilgrims may then hope that Grace will grant them entry, whereupon, Piers promises, they shall see what the court encloses: "Thow shalt see in þiselue Trupe sitte in þyn herte/ In a cheyne of charite" (B.5.606–7). *This* is the court that inspires and sets the standards for the type of *cortesie* that Liberum Arbitrium promotes, and as Piers's instructions reveal, this court is a *kynde* place, a place known by heart.

Langland's theology in B.5 is thoroughly orthodox: salvation requires faith *and* works; there are no shortcuts: amends must be made, and justice must be served, though ultimately Grace keeps the gate. But it is also an optimistic theology. One need not suggest that nature alone suffices to suggest that nature is sufficient, that in the time of grace human beings have a natural capacity to find their way to truth. For Langland this is so because truth resides *in kynde*. Indeed, immediately following Liberum Arbitrium's calls to evangelize non-Christians in C.17, at the beginning of the next passus he leads Will to the same court of which Piers speaks in B.5/C.7, here a "contre" called "*Cor-hominis*" (C.17.4). His heart is an enclosed garden ("the [e]rber of alle pryuatees and of holynesse," C.17.5) wherein the "*Ymago-Dei*," also known as the tree of Charity or "Treweloue," grows (C.17.7, 9). This "ympe," implanted in the human heart by God himself, represents the creation of humankind as act of divine *cortesie*,

an act of cultivation that fuses the orders of nature and grace in the human person. Contrary to a strict reading of Liberum Arbitrium's warning in the previous passus, then, the revelation that charity resides in the court of the human heart suggests that *kynde* is never truly *sanz cortisie*: looking within, Will discovers God's grace in nature.

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